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On Hazardous Service

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On Hazardous Service

BY

MERVYN LAMB

William Blackwood and Sons
Edinburgh and London
1921

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TO

MADEMOISELLE ———————

AND

THE NOBLE COMPANY OF MEN AND WOMEN WHO,
ANIMATED BY THE HIGHEST PATRIOTISM,
RISKED THEIR LIVES BEHIND
THE ENEMY'S LINES.

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On Hazardous Service.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCING JEAN BART.

On a hot evening at the beginning of August, a blue motor-car, which had evidently travelled far and fast, entered a small village in Picardy, and passing down the main street drew up in a cloud of dust before a little red-bricked school-house, outside of which one or two men of the British Signal Corps were standing.

Out of it stepped a French officer, wearing the brassard of the Liaison Staff, whilst from the front seat next the chauffeur descended a square-built infantry soldier of about forty years of age.

Telling the chauffeur to wait, the officer entered the brick courtyard, which served as a playground for the children, and mounted the wooden stairs leading to the upper classroom, where four or five tired-looking British

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staff officers were engrossed in writing on wooden trestle-tables, or in studying maps which seemed to cover every square inch of available space. Passing through this room, the officer entered a small boarded-off compartment and greeted the solitary occupant, saying: "Sir, I have brought the soldier, Jean Bart, who has been placed at your disposition by the *Dixième Armée.*"

The British officer rose from the solitary chair in front of the solitary trestle-table in the room, thanked him cordially, and suggesting that Monsieur le Capitaine would probably be glad to get back to his billet and get some food, added that he need have no further anxiety as regards the soldier, since the British Intelligence Department would assume all further responsibility for his support from that moment.

And indeed this particular officer was more than a little pleased to see this particular French soldier.

For days, lengthening into weeks, the women and children, who alone were left in the fields, had stopped from time to time to gaze nervously towards the east; and at night, when the clouds came down low, they had shuddered as the windows in the little village rattled and the distant rumble rose to a shattering roar.

For this was the fifth week of one of the great battles of the war, and, as the reader may already have guessed, the energies of

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a huge army were being directed from this unsophisticated little village.

In the school-house, in conditions very different to the popular ideas of high life on the gilded Staff, was located the Intelligence branch of the General Staff, and the upper room was in communication not only with every army on the Western Front, but also with every part of the globe where German troops were fighting.

Nor were things going altogether well. A great success had unquestionably been won, but progress was every day becoming harder and more costly; in fact, it was bludgeon work, the effect of which on the enemy's plans was difficult to gauge, and it was precisely this problem which the officers in the school-house had to solve.

Actually on the British front, the documents, prisoners, intercepted cipher messages, &c., at which the Staff slaved all day and far into the night, gave a fairly accurate picture of the situation. But what lay behind? Ah! that was indeed the question.

Was the enemy moving troops away to Russia to meet Brusilov's advance? Had he definitely abandoned his great offensive in Eastern France? Was he about to organise a great counter-stroke against the flank of the spear-head, which had been thrust by the British into his side; or did he intend to straighten out the line by a retirement?

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Unfortunately, at this crisis, a series of misfortunes had befallen the Intelligence Service.

The worthy miner, travelling with important messages in the lining of his cap from Mons to Hal, had thought fit to try and take them on to Brussels, where he had a lady friend, instead of placing them in the rear axle-box of the second carriage of the vicinal train, from which their contents would have quickly reached the little school-house, and swept away many awkward doubts.

This error of judgment had led to the death of several devoted patriots, and had enabled the German police to make wholesale arrests, which had destroyed at one blow much of the patient work of many months.

The delicate web could and would be rewoven in time; but time was not available, if the present problem was to be solved before the Germans had themselves supplied the answer.

Consequently all northern France, including the French armies, was canvassed for a man willing to take the greatest risk; and Jean Bart was that man.

A determined, cheery-looking fellow, he was now in voluble conversation with the Staff Officer, and the latter had established the fact that in private life he was a *fraudeur*, or smuggler, in a big way of business apparently, and thoroughly proud of the fact. Did he not possess a fast lorry and a motor-

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car? And had he not, on one of his last trips, got across the frontier with 20,000 francs' worth of tobacco, and only one man wounded. As the two pored over a large-scale map, Jean pointed out the wood near Bohain where he had unfortunately wounded a *garde champêtre*, who attempted to interfere with one of their midnight operations; and the little lock bridge near Condé, where on another occasion he had stopped pursuit by broaching petrol-tins and setting them on fire. His cheery face shone as he recounted the various exploits which the familiar landmarks recalled. "*Ma foi!* but this life in trenches, like a rat in a sewer, at the beck and call of fat-headed sous-officiers, was *très-ennuyant*. No scope for a man of brains and intelligence," said he, twirling his moustache. "Only put me over there in my own country amongst my friends, and I will give the '*sales Boches*' something to think about."

"Money! You insult me, *mon Commandant*. I am a *soldat français* and chief of *fraudeurs*, and what I do, I do for *la gloire et la patrie*"—and his blue eyes sparkled as he threw out his chest.

Then more thoughtfully he added, that the English officer might be of some assistance, *après la guerre*, in that small question of the *garde champêtre* and the five years' imprisonment, which was still waiting to be liquidated—but that was a matter of no immediate importance.

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After a further close study of the map the officer took up a telephone on the table, and shortly afterwards an alert-looking sergeant appeared.

"You will take this French soldier, and will provide him with a billet and food for the night, and I will see him again at 10 A.M. to-morrow. In the meantime I have warned him not to discuss his business with you, nor with any one else in the village."

When they had gone, the officer again took up the telephone, and after a few minutes conversation with a Flying Corps Squadron Commander, returned to the study of certain little pieces of paper on which he had previously been engaged, and which lasted far into the night.

Next morning a young major in flying corps uniform might have been seen in earnest conversation with the staff officer over the map. Finally, the former said: "Well, if it must be done and can be done, my lads will do it, but I don't like it. You see, this front is stiff with Boche machines, and though they don't venture over our side much, my people have to fight whenever they go across the line. We spot new aerodromes nearly every day, and any lame duck has a pretty poor chance of getting home. These places west of the Canal du Nord are out of the question, as our planes are shot up heavily whenever they go over them.

"These two farther East might be better,

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but it's the deuce of a long flight for a slow two-seater machine—and of course it's out of the question to try and land a fast machine in such conditions; it would not have a hundred to one chance of getting off again.

"It's all very well for these French fellows, who can select a place they actually know and generally on a quiet front. I suppose you haven't sounded them on the subject?"

The Staff Officer nodded, and added laconically, "Nothing doing; they've lost too many already at the game."

"Well," said the Flying Officer, "our only chance is in an east wind; the Huns don't care about coming too close to the line for fear of our forcing them over our side, and we might get a flying start. We must reconnoitre the place beforehand, as there's a ground mist most evenings, and that is the devil, as you can't see what you are going down into. Anyway, we'll make a strong fighting reconnaissance to-day to see whether there are any fresh aerodromes about and try and draw their 'Archies.' We'll also photo the place you suggest, if we can get anywhere near it. In the meantime you'll be getting all possible information from refugees, and teaching the Frenchman your side of the business before I take him on? Right-o!" and out he went, a very fine type of the determined young Englishman who made the British Flying Service the first in the world.

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CHAPTER II.

JEAN BART TAKES THE AIR.

For Jean Bart the next few days were strongly reminiscent of his village school-days. He learnt all the intricacies of the German uniform; how to tell a guardsman from a fusilier, or field artillery from foot artillery; where to look for the regimental number; which were the important marks on vehicles; the difference between Divisional, Corps, and Army pennants, and other similar details. He wrote apparently meaningless messages on little pieces of flimsy paper, rolled them up and fitted them into little aluminium cases; he was taught how to look after pigeons, and when to release them. At night he practised sending a simple code by means of an electric torch.

Certain names, certain places, and certain dates he committed to memory, and with the marvellous adaptability of the intelligent Frenchman he absorbed it all with the greatest ease.

At the end of three days he was ready for

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instruction at the Aerodrome, to which he looked forward with keen pleasure, having never been in an aeroplane.

Here, things had not turned out too well.

The fighting reconnaissance of four machines had crossed the line at a great height, and headed straight for the objective, which they reached without opposition, except from "Archies" near the line. One pilot then dived down to get a better look, and was promptly attacked by seven enemy machines, which had been following and waiting for such a chance. A general *mêlée* ensued, in which both sides lost a machine, whilst one of ours only struggled back over the line with great difficulty, covered by the remaining two, who fought a gallant rearguard action against ever-increasing odds. It also crashed on landing, the pilot being badly wounded, and the camera unfortunately was smashed. However, the general impression gained was that Jean Bart's statements were correct, and that it might be possible to land him there and for the aeroplane to get away again.

It was decided to make the attempt as soon as the wind was favourable. Meanwhile Jean Bart was shown how to swing the propeller, and practised getting in and out quickly, in which he displayed great agility. He was also taught to use the Lewis gun, and given short flights to train him in picking out landmarks on the ground, in all of which

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he showed great aptitude, and established a firm *entente* with his instructor. The latter was a fair-haired, blue-eyed youth, named Archer, aged eighteen or nineteen, with a frank, cheery face, no vestige of even an incipient moustache, and a pink-and-white complexion—a typical product, in fact, of our Public Schools—keen, clean, and modest. Though he had not been long in the service, he had done extremely well, otherwise he would hardly have been selected for this particular enterprise.

On the fifth day the wind had shifted to the north-east, and it was decided to make the attempt, the start being timed so as to reach the landing-place just at dusk, whilst there was still light enough to see the ground, but close enough to darkness to give Jean Bart a chance of getting away with his stock-in-trade.

The latter consisted of a large basket containing seven of the finest carrier-pigeons in France, a bag of grain, message forms and carriers, an electric torch, an automatic pistol and some food, whilst under his uniform he wore an old corduroy suit.

The sun was well down below the horizon when, at 9.15 P.M., Jean Bart, after a last word with the Staff Officer, stepped into the machine, followed by the pilot who had instructed him. The latter, after some preliminary tests, gave the word—"Stand clear"; and the machine left the aerodrome, closely

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followed by two fighting scouts, which were to see it a short way on its eighty-miles outward journey, in case any enemy machines, contrary to their usual custom, should still be in the air.

Steadily they made their way eastwards, whilst to the south the roar of the guns on the Ancre grew ever clearer. Soon they were crossing the great Canal du Nord, over which the mist was beginning to gather, and in another twenty minutes came in sight of the little wood, just beyond which lay the landing-ground. The pilot throttled down his engine and began to lose height, coming down so as just to skim over the trees. It was already getting dusk, and he decided to fly low over the ground, which was evidently short grass, to see how best to land and get out again. It was indeed fortunate that he did so, for a large herd of cattle, which had been lying down, jumped up and scattered over the field in all directions, making any landing impossible. At the same time, from a shed at the side, a number of men in uniform came out and stared open-mouthed at the aeroplane prior to running back to get their rifles.

The pilot opened out his engine and just cleared the trees on the far side; but what was the next step?

Evidently they had come down into the middle of a big German supply convoy, probably driving cattle requisitioned from the unfortunate inhabitants.

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There was still half an hour before dark, and the pilot was loath to abandon his mission, so he flew on, looking for another place to land, trying to ascertain from Jean Bart by signs whether each field was any good. The latter had, however, now lost his bearings completely, and it was getting too dark and misty to see the ground distinctly from the air. Archer therefore rose to try and get his bearings, with a view to making his way home. Unfortunately the mist had already blotted out the edges of the woods, none of the distant landmarks were visible, and he found that he was dependent entirely on the compass, a most uncertain guide in a strong wind. However, he steered a westerly course in the gathering storm, but it must have been nearly an hour before, to his intense relief, he at last saw the long line of Very lights, which from Switzerland to the sea marked the opposing trench lines throughout the hours of darkness.

He crossed them, but could see no sign of the rockets which he knew were being sent up from all the aerodromes near his starting-point.

It was now past midnight, and in the faint moonlight he could make out very little of the ground below him. However, his petrol would soon be running out, so selecting an apparently open space he came down, turned on his wing lights, saw that it was a field of standing corn in which a proper land-

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ing was impossible, and "pancaked" artistically.

Thus it was that, next morning, the squadron commander received a telephone message to say that Lieutenant Archer and his machine and passenger were down, undamaged, 100 miles to the south in the French lines, and would be along in the course of the day.

That evening, after hearing Archer's story, the Squadron Commander had a long consultation with the Staff Officer.

He thought the pilot would have a better chance by going a little earlier, since this would enable him to see the ground, and perhaps obviate any preliminary reconnaissance, which was a costly business, and put the Hun on the watch. Obviously the enemy would know now what was in the wind. A young pilot in the squadron was very anxious to be allowed to try, and if any one could do the trick he fancied this lad Albert would. So two evenings later, but considerably earlier than on the first occasion, Jean Bart again mounted a machine in front of a small youth whose name was destined later to become famous throughout the Empire.

There was nothing to show that he appreciated the danger of flying alone in daylight into the middle of the Huns, except possibly his sole remark—"I suppose the Froggie can use the gun. Tell him to keep it handy."

Escorted as before, the machine left, heading in the direction of Le Cateau. So soon

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as they crossed the lines, they were heavily "archied," but going straight ahead the pilot, in about fifty minutes after crossing the line, came in sight of the appointed place, and dived down towards it.

At that moment Jean Bart saw two German machines standing, and another just landing on an aerodrome a couple of miles to the south, whilst not far to the north there was another large aerodrome. Nor was this all—for as they lost height they were heavily fired at from the ground, and the pilot recognised the fact that, even if he did land Jean Bart, the latter had not the faintest chance of getting clear away.

Without an instant's hesitation he swung his machine round, and went straight for the aerodrome to the south just as an enemy machine started to rise. Jean Bart's eyes brightened as he guessed what was up, and cleared the Lewis gun for action. The difficulties of taking steady aim from an aeroplane are only dimly appreciated by those who have not tried, and the muzzle of Jean's gun was describing uncertain circles as they approached the quarry. By the time they were over the aerodrome the latter was still only some 100 feet above the ground, and without sufficient air room to manœuvre. Amidst an ill-directed fusilade from the ground Albert dived at him, and Jean Bart managed to empty a drum somewhere in his direction, as the Hun turned quickly to the right.

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Whether the Frenchman hit him, or whether, as is far more probable, the Hun merely side-slipped in trying to avoid them, they saw him crash sideways on to a hangar and disappear through the roof. Albert promptly headed his machine across the aerodrome to where a crowd of mechanics and pilots were trying to get two more machines ready for the air.

These ran for cover to the hangars, towards which Jean Bart emptied another drum, and then the pilot headed for home, with the conviction that it would be some little time before they recovered sufficiently to pursue him, and that darkness would then cover his retreat.

Needless to say the Frenchman's share in this exploit lost nothing in the telling, and the Staff Officer had some difficulty in curbing his ambition to blossom out as an "Ace," and bring him back to the less romantic but more important work in hand.

In spite of two fine efforts success seemed no nearer, and time was passing. After much anxious discussion it was decided to make one more attempt, and if that failed, to wait for the full moon about the end of the month and try a night landing, which had never yet been attempted or been regarded as a feasible operation.

The two attempts had shown that if the first had been too late the second had undoubtedly been too early.

The new place selected was rather north

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of what appeared to be the main area of German rest billets, and about five miles from Jean's village, where he said he knew of a suitable place.

Archer, who had been bitterly disappointed at the first failure, had loyally accepted his supercession by Albert, but he now begged to be allowed to try again, and his offer was accepted. Thus it came about that one evening, just before nine o'clock, the two left the aerodrome, equally determined, but perhaps a little less hopeful than on the first occasion.

As they proceeded eastwards, the pilot could see that ground mist was already lying thick in the valleys, which boded ill. But he had no thought of turning back, and eventually Jean pointed towards a round hillock, on which three trees were plainly visible rising out of the mist, and beyond which was apparently a level blanket of fog, lying between two woods.

This was the place, but what the landing would be like, it was quite impossible to say. However, Archer put the nose of his machine down, went into the mist, skimmed a high hedge, and seeing that the visible part of the field beyond was lucerne, instantly decided to chance it and touched ground. As the machine ran on, to his horror out of the mist appeared a line of uncut corn, and beyond it again a high hedge similar to that over which he had come in. He switched off his engine, and the machine just stopped in

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time to avoid the corn, which would probably have turned it over.

"*Bon!*" said Jean Bart with emphasis, and in a second was out and putting the pigeons, &c., in the corn, blissfully unconscious of the awkward predicament in which the pilot had landed himself.

The latter, after a hasty glance round the field, rapidly decided that he had only one chance of getting out, and that was to go back to the hedge over which he had come in. From there, if he could clear the corn, he might be able to clear the hedge beyond it. It was a poor chance, but there was nothing else for it. Fortunately he knew a tolerable amount of French, and calling to Jean, he explained that the latter must swing the propeller to start up the engine, and then slew the machine round and take him back to the hedge.

Although Jean knew that the alarm must by now have been given, and that every minute's delay endangered his prospects of escape, he carried out Archer's instructions with perfect *sang-froid*, walking back with the machine whilst it taxied to the hedge, and slewing it round again there. He held it until told to "stand clear," and then watched the machine dash across the field, where to his dismay he saw it half rise and then crash heavily in the corn, turning over on one wing.

He ran after it, and found Archer scrambling

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out, with blood streaming from a cut on the side of his head, but otherwise apparently unhurt. Looking at his machine, the latter remarked—"Well, that's torn it"; and then to Jean in French—"You'd better clear off and get on with your job; never mind about me."

Thus it came about that the watchers in the aerodrome waited in vain for the machine which came not, and that anxious inquiries to other aerodromes that night and next morning produced no result, and that a gloom descended on the squadron for the boy who had taken more than an ordinary risk, and had last been seen by the escort disappearing down into the clouds beyond the Canal du Nord.

Likewise the two elderly privates, sitting sleepily after tea in the kitchen of the little white cottage in the main street near the school-house, seemed depressed, to judge from their occasional remarks, such as—"poor little beggars, done in, I guess;" or "—— hard lines, I calls it."

It was past six o'clock, when the sharp ring of an electric bell brought them both to their feet with a jump and sent them dashing up the rickety stairs with surprising agility.

At the top they opened a door leading into a loft in which were some fifty pigeons, and in a solitary compartment was one bird with the magic carrier on her leg.

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The two privates, beaming with delight, gently released it, and whilst one of them went proudly off with the message to the school-house, the other attended to the pigeon with all the British soldier's love of animals, and special affection for this particular tired bird.

When the Staff Officer opened the message he read—

"Vive les Anglais.
Deux Amis."

Then, calling up the squadron commander, he said: "They've got down and away with the birds and your lad is all right. He must have made a bad landing, but I don't despair of seeing him back again. We must see that there is something good waiting for him when he does turn up."

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CHAPTER III.

IN THE LIONS' DEN.

We must now go back to where we left the two standing by the crashed aeroplane. Jean absolutely declined to budge unless Archer accompanied him, and since every moment's delay was probably bringing nearer the miscellaneous assortment of cyclists, security police, dogs and *Landsturm*, who might be expected to be in motion towards the aeroplane, there was no time to be lost. The machine was sure to be found in the morning in any case, and the enemy would be on the track of a certainty, instead of following up the usual rumours which plague the nerves of the occupants of back areas in every army, and of the Germans in particular.

Jean evidently had already made up his mind as to what he intended to do, for, picking up the pigeons, he made for a wood a few hundred yards to the N.-W., into which he plunged. It was now nearly dark and the mist was getting thicker, so that Archer

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began to feel more secure, though it was eerie work.

After about two hours' steady walking, mostly through woods, they reached a ruined shrine in a small clearing. Here Jean proceeded to divest himself of his uniform, and pulling an old cap over his ears and rubbing earth on his face, he announced that he was going to visit some friends and see how the land lay, but would be back before dawn. Meanwhile Archer had better lie down in the undergrowth, see that no vermin got at the pigeons, and listen for his whistle.

Evidently the shrine was quite close to a village and to a main road, as presently some mounted men clattered down it followed by a long column of either transport or artillery.

Hours passed, and Archer was beginning to wonder whether anything had happened to Jean, when he heard the latter's low whistle, and he appeared carrying some bundles. He seemed considerably put out, and it transpired that the village was full of Boches, that Jean's house had been turned into a bureau, and that a fat swine of a non-commissioned officer, or what the Boche called a *Feldwebel*, had taken up his abode in his aunt's house, which would otherwise have been a comfortable hiding-place.

Also the news about the aeroplane had been spread by some mounted police who had just ridden in. He much regretted that he should be unable to offer *Monsieur le Lieu-*

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tenant the hospitality which he had hoped —at any rate for the present—and he would have to put him in *les caves.*

For the benefit of those who have not heard of the Caves of Monchy, or how the best part of two Divisions assembled in the subterranean passages under Arras, prior to Allenby's great assault, it may be mentioned that the frugal Frenchman does not cut the huge open chalk-pits which scar the face of England, having instead too much regard for the value of the land. In the limestone country, when he wishes to build a village, he makes a few shafts into the ground and then tunnels out below without further breaking the surface, building the village probably on the top or close at hand. Jean's village had been built on this sound economic principle, and the smugglers had had frequent reason to bless the foresight of their ancestors.

The first pale light of dawn was beginning to show as Jean led the way through the wood in the direction of the village. When apparently quite close to it, he crawled under a large clump of bushes, and pulling aside some loose dead branches, flashed his torch into what appeared to be a round hole leading into the chalk, down which he promptly disappeared. Archer, following him, slid down it for a short distance, and then found himself on roughly-cut steps leading to a large vaulted chamber in the white limestone. Jean meantime had gone back

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to rearrange the cover at the entrance, and then rejoining him, led the way for several hundred yards through an apparently endless labyrinth of passages connecting large chambers similar to the first. At one point Jean stopped, and pointing to some steps leading up, said: "My house." A little farther on he again stopped before similar steps, and explained that they led up to the floor of the room of his aunt's house, in which lived the accursed Feldwebel, and that a heavy chest of drawers was placed over the trap-door to conceal it.

Jean then remarked that he must send one of the pigeons off to *le Commandant*, to let him know they had arrived, but that he would have to wait until the sun was up, otherwise the bird might hang about or go into a loft, and then anything might happen to it. The Germans had killed all the pigeons in the country except those in lofts kept for their own use, and therefore it was a ticklish job sending a pigeon off. However, Adrienne was *très débrouillard* and would manage that.

Adrienne, it appeared, was his so-called niece, living with her grandmother, Jean's aunt, and in the light of after events, Archer had every reason to agree that the description fitly described her ready wit and fearless spirit. He went on to tell Archer that at least for the next ten days he would be employed in carrying out "le Commandant's" instructions. For this purpose he would

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have to collect some friends, and send them out on various missions over the country as far south as St Quentin and up to the Belgian frontier in the north. He hoped to be able to send off six pigeons with messages at intervals of not more than two days, as he got the reports in, and in one of the last ones he was to give a rendezvous for an aeroplane, bringing a fresh lot of pigeons, which would come when there was a full moon in about twelve days' time. This would mean sending signals from the ground; hence the torch.

"Le Commandant" and he had tentatively fixed on certain possible places, which *les aviateurs* thought they could find, but they would have to be reconnoitred to see which was safest. This he proposed to do himself, being now an expert in all flying matters,—and Archer suppressed a smile.

The whole thing was not going to be easy. The Boches had registered the occupants of every house, and all had to be at home from 6 P.M. till 6 A.M., during which time Security Police made surprise visits and compared the occupants with the descriptions on the doors. François, Pierre, and several others of his best men had already been deported, and the whole countryside was terrorised by frequent perquisitions and arrests on the evidence of *agents provocateurs*, recruited by the enemy from amongst the meaner spirited of the population. Let these curs wait till

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after the war! and he drew his hand expressively across his throat. Then again, no one could move a mile outside the village without a pass stamped by the *Kommandantur*, with which the Feldwebel was apparently connected.

In the meantime Archer must just lie low, and he would see what could be done to extricate him when the hue and cry had subsided a little.

Presently he took a message form, wrote a few words on it, and selecting a pigeon from the basket, fixed a carrier to its leg. Then taking off his boots, he crept quietly up the steps, and when six feet along a passage, sat down at the foot of a wooden ladder, fixed to the side of a short vertical shaft.

Some time elapsed before the movement of a heavy weight above was followed by the lifting of a trap-door. A long whispered conversation followed, after which the pigeon was handed through, and Jean returned, blowing out the little oil-lamp, and saying that they could now sleep till night as there was nothing more to be done.

Archer woke to find Jean standing over him, saying that he was now going out and that if Archer wanted some fresh air he could come too. Looking at his watch, he saw that it was 11 P.M. Jean suggested that he should change into the clothes which he had brought in one of the bundles; but Archer

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preferred to stay in uniform, as otherwise, if caught, he would certainly be shot off-hand as a spy, and also implicate the villagers as having supplied him with civilian clothes.

Jean led the way through the "caves" to the shrine in the wood, where they were shortly joined by five or six men, mostly of middle age, and one girl, who so far as Archer could see was about the same age as himself, and who was evidently Adrienne. A long consultation followed, Jean issuing instructions in a very clear and precise manner; and after about an hour the men disappeared quietly into the darkness, only Jean and Adrienne remaining.

"I have told them to come back here in two days' time to report," said the former, "and I am now going to make the reconnaissances for the aeroplane. If I am not back, Adrienne will arrange to collect reports and send off the pigeons."

"Yes," said Adrienne with a charming smile, "and I will charge myself with Monsieur's welfare during the absence of my uncle. Monsieur will be well cared for, but I fear he will find it somewhat dull down in that horrible cave. And Monsieur is wounded," she added sympathetically as she noted the gash on the side of his forehead.

Several days passed; days of intense boredom for Archer, broken only by occasional visits from Jean and by glimpses of the

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pretty face of Adrienne through the trap-door during the absence of the Feldwebel, when she handed him food and dressed his wound with tender care. He sometimes wondered that food seemed so plentiful; he did not know that the girl and her grandmother were half-starving themselves so that their uninvited guest should want for nothing. As to the intelligence work, he had only a general idea of what was going on, beyond the fact that five pigeons had been sent off with information covering the country for 30 miles round, whilst Jean had decided on a place about 8 miles away as being the best for the aeroplane, which was to come with the full moon and was due in six days' time. After talking over the matter with Archer, they decided to suggest that the aeroplane should land and take Archer back, instead of merely dropping pigeons from the air, as had been planned by "le Commandant."

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CHAPTER IV.

A NEAR THING.

ONE morning Jean returned in a state of great excitement. It seemed that there was a big movement of troops taking place. All numbers had been covered up, and he could not find out where the troops had come from; but they all seemed to be passing towards the west, moving only at night, and staying in the woods and villages by day.

Every day the village was full of drowsy troops who passed away in the night, only to be succeeded by a fresh lot, and the same thing was reported on other roads right up to the Belgian frontier. He must get some information as to the unit numbers for *Monsieur le Commandant.* A German officer had taken up his quarters in the aunt's house, leaving only the kitchen and one room for the family. Apparently he had something to do with the staff directing the movement, as Adrienne said his room was full of papers, and telephones had been put in. Unfortunately neither Jean nor

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Adrienne could understand their *sale language*—but perhaps Monsieur Archaire did? in which case there might be something to be done. On Archer's saying that he had learnt German at school, Jean and Adrienne, who had no knowledge of how languages are taught in England, at once decided that he should raid the officer's room when Adrienne gave the word, which would probably be about 11 A.M., as both the Germans went out somewhere to feed about that time.

To understand subsequent events, a brief description of Adrienne's house is necessary.

This was the ordinary single-storied, four-roomed farmhouse, two rooms being on either side of a passage, which ran through from the front door to a back door opening into a courtyard behind. On the right of the passage, the German officer occupied the front room, whilst the Feldwebel lived in the rear room looking on to the courtyard. On the other side of the passage, the front room was a kitchen, opening into the back room where Adrienne and her grandmother slept. The whole of the top of the house was one big attic, reached by a wooden staircase halfway down the centre passage.

On the far side of the courtyard was the usual type of two-storied French barn, the lower half being divided in the middle to separate the carts from the horses, whilst the whole of the upper storey was used for straw and hay.

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The time for the raid arrived, and Archer climbed the ladder and passed through the trap-door into the back room. Jean replaced the trap-door and put the chest of drawers in its usual position on the top. Then they went along the passage to the door of the front room, which was locked. However, Jean produced some wire, with which he opened it, and, whilst Adrienne watched from the window, Archer made a hasty inspection of the interior. On the table were two telephones and a mass of telegraph messages, neatly arranged in clips, some being apparently messages received, and others copies of messages sent to different addresses. The ones not in cipher apparently all related to the supply of provisions to troops, and he thought what a gold-mine this would be to any one who understood intelligence work. To him they conveyed very little, but he noticed that one file was all addressed to A.O.K. 1, and that another contained messages from the same addressee, but all in cipher, and he could of course make nothing of them. The messages on other files appeared to be addressed to 51 R.D., 7 B.D., 125 I.D., and 126 I.D., which numbers he wrote down on a piece of the German's paper with that gentleman's pencil, whose name, he ascertained, was General-Stab-Major von Brittstein. He could make nothing of any of the various papers in the drawers of the table, and a tin box, which probably, he

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thought, contained the cipher, he could not open. He debated for a moment whether he should take it away bodily, but remembered that he could never get it across the lines, and would certainly cause the arrest of Adrienne and her grandmother as soon as it was missed, so he decided that the game was hardly worth the candle. More than half an hour had passed and Adrienne was obviously getting anxious, so he called to Jean, who was talking to Grand'mère in the kitchen, to come back and lock the door again. In spite of Adrienne's protestations, Jean then insisted that Archer should go and see the old lady, and this delay had serious consequences, for they had been in the kitchen barely two minutes, when the little gate outside clanged and heavy boots mounted the steps and entered the passage.

There were apparently three men, and Archer heard the words *Engländer* and *Taube*, whilst, apparently, the third man, probably the Feldwebel, was protesting that the occupants were *güte leute*.

Adrienne was the first to recover, and pointing to the back bedroom whispered, "*Vite!* go in there! and when you hear me drop a pail, get out of the window and go to the hay-loft." Then, picking up a pail, she went to the door and said: "Good afternoon, gentlemen; we have no room, as *Monsieur le Sergent* will tell you; we have an officer billeted here besides himself—unless,"

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she added, "you wish me and Grand'mère to sleep in the attic with the rats!"

One of the two men, both of whom were of a strong Jewish type, replied roughly in good French: "We believe you have been harbouring a cursed English swine. A carrier-pigeon was shot down close to this village two days ago, and that blackguardly uncle of yours has been seen in the neighbourhood. We'll find him or you will go to jail."

"*Monsieur le Sergent*," replied the girl, turning to the Feldwebel, "can say whether any Englishman could have been in this house without his knowing it—and I beg to inform Monsieur, that my father fell at the Marne, and that my uncle, like my father, is doing his duty in the ever-victorious French Army," she added proudly.

The police officer was about to reply, when von Brittstein entered, and seeing the police uniform, asked haughtily what they were doing in his billet. At this moment Adrienne dropped her bucket, whilst the man clicked his heels and proceeded to explain their mission at considerable length.

Adrienne then started on an impassioned speech, appealing frequently to the Feldwebel, which, however, was cut short by the Major turning to the policemen and telling them to hurry up about their business, and to take care that they did not disturb him, or it would be the worse for them. He then went into his room and banged the door.

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Rather crestfallen, the two told Adrienne to come with them. She gave the Feldwebel a look and he followed, partly no doubt from curiosity, but also to be able to say "told you so" to the police. The latter searched the house thoroughly, but, needless to say, without any result.

Adrienne hoped that they would now depart, but one of them, noticing the barn, said: "Ha! that looks a likely place; we have not tried that yet. Come, girl, we have not nearly finished with you yet."

Picking up her pail again, as if going to draw water from the pump in the yard, Adrienne followed them across the courtyard. She then unchained a fierce-looking sheep-dog, which resented the approach of the Germans to the barn, and holding it by the collar, remarked, "Charles does not love *Messieurs les Allemands*, and I will hold him whilst you search."

Archer and Jean, lying close to the edge of the loft, were listening breathlessly, and Archer for one thought that they were now surely cornered.

In the lower half of the barn, in the far corner of which the ladder to the loft was situated, was a great farm waggon piled high with straw, filling half the floor space and almost touching the boards above, and completely concealing the ladder from the courtyard.

Adrienne, whose quick brain had already

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decided on a plan, stood just outside in the courtyard watching, as the three men, after searching the lower half, reached the bottom of the ladder. As the first man put his foot on the bottom rung, she slipped off the dog's collar, dropping her pail, and shouting, "*Attention! Attention!* The dog, the dog—he will devour you!"

Attacked suddenly in the rear, the two Security Policemen both tried to get up the ladder simultaneously, and Charles got his teeth into the gaiter of one, who yelled with terror. The Feldwebel, whom the dog knew, stood at the foot of the ladder, shouting with laughter at the undignified discomfiture of the men who, apart from being Jews, had annoyed him by their self-importance and air of superiority. Also, if the truth be told, he had a sneaking admiration for the pretty French girl, and now took her part against the irate police.

Meantime Jean, followed by Archer, had jumped down on to a manure-heap and slipped across the courtyard into the back door of the house, and by the time Adrienne had again secured the dog, they were up in the attic. Major von Brittstein, immersed in his work, if he heard the fracas, did not consider it consistent with his dignity to leave the front room. Thus it happened that, shortly afterwards, the two policemen left the house uttering threats against Adrienne, her family, and more particularly her dog;

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but she rightly concluded that they would not return for some time to come, and that the stowaways would be safe in the attic, since escape to the "caves" was now cut off by the return of the Feldwebel to his room.

When Adrienne arrived there she threw her arms round Jean's neck, half-laughing, half-crying, and kissed him; and then followed suit with "Monsieur Archaire," much to the boy's surprise and embarrassment.

In fact he coloured to the roots of his hair, and observing it, an answering flag of distress mantled the girl's cheeks. Nor were matters in any way improved by Jean's chaffing remarks—"Your turn now, Monsieur; fair exchange is no robbery; go on, I won't tell any one"; and more of the same kind, until Adrienne felt inclined to sink into the ground, and Archer could have cursed him aloud.

The girl took the first opportunity of leaving them, and when later she passed them down to the "caves" in the Feldwebel's absence, she was evidently still perturbed, and it was some days before she partially regained her frankness and air of *bonne camaraderie.*

That evening was spent in writing out the information gained. Archer wondered whether the numbers he had got were any good. He came to the conclusion that the four were the 51st Reserve Division, the

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7th Bavarian Division, and the 125th and 126th Infantry Divisions; probably formations which were using the route through the village, or anyway were in the neighbourhood; in which surmise he was quite correct. His reminiscences of Otto's German Grammar threw no light on the "A.O.K. 1." It sounded like some Army Ordnance Korps unit, but equally it might be something more important, and he eventually put it in on chance. Jean also decided that, as there would be only one more pigeon after this, he would put down the identity number of the place for the next aeroplane, with details of their plan, and repeat it on the seventh and last pigeon to make sure that the Staff Officer got it. What the police had said about shooting a pigeon was rather disturbing, and it would not do to trust over much to the safe arrival of a solitary bird.

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CHAPTER V.

THE COMING OF THE AEROPLANE.

THE sixth pigeon had been safely despatched, and Archer was back in the "caves," sleeping by day and only going out at night to lie up on the edge of the great road and watch the endless procession of guns, infantry, and transport, which passed towards the West. As he timed the columns, how he prayed that the Intelligence Department would be able to fathom the secret of this great movement from the messages which the pigeons brought to them.

The seventh and last pigeon was to go that morning, confirming the rendezvous previously given, but when Jean came in from his nightly prowl his first words were a cold douche. "The accursed, clumsy swine have started to build a camp in the wood within a few hundred yards of our landing-ground, and they are digging practice trenches in our field. If the aeroplane tries to land there, as we suggested, it will be crashed to a certainty. We shall have to change to the

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other place three miles beyond. Thank God, Adrienne has still got one more pigeon, and we must get it off to-day."

So the last message was prepared with great care, and at the usual time, when the Feldwebel went out to his meal, it was handed up to Adrienne. She got the bird out of a hiding-place in the back room and carried it in the bosom of her dress into the kitchen. The use of the aluminium carrier had been abandoned, as making the birds too conspicuous, and she was just starting to tie the message round its leg with thread, when it commenced to coo loudly. She put her hand over its head, but too late, for the door of von Brittstein's room was pushed open and his hand was already on the kitchen door. Adrienne did the only thing possible, and she did it without an instant's hesitation.

When the German entered the room, she was stirring a pot on the stove, the message was in her mouth, and the bird with a twisted neck was under her skirt.

"I heard a pigeon," he thundered, as he stared round the room.

"Monsieur must have been mistaken, I think," she said quietly; "but he is at liberty either to search me or the room. Has Monsieur looked on the roof? He will know that there is a German pigeon loft at the end of the road, and the birds may have been released for exercise." The Major glanced uneasily round the room, and then, his

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suspicions somewhat allayed by her calmness, went outside to look at the roof. By the time that he returned to interrogate her again, the dead pigeon was at the back of the stove.

When, with tears in her eyes, she broke the news about *le pauvre petit oiseau* to Jean, the latter looked very grave, and with good reason. Their only hope of returning by air was now entirely removed. For himself he did not mind, as he still had many arrangements to make for "le Commandant" up in Belgium, and, besides, he had other means; but it would be a bitter blow for the boy, who had been counting the days when he could get back to his squadron. Worse still, there was a good chance of the aeroplane and its pilot being captured, unless it could be warned, and this meant signalling to it from close to the new camp. *N'importe!* that would have to be risked, and when Jean told Archer, the latter insisted that he would accompany him. They bitterly regretted having proposed an actual landing, instead of leaving the arrangement, as originally made by the Commandant, at merely dropping pigeons from the air.

The route to the rendezvous was a long and circuitous one, and as they had to be there by 11.30 P.M., this meant starting the night before and lying up during the day. Carrying stout bludgeons, they emerged from the wood about midnight, where Adrienne,

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at great personal risk and in spite of the moonlight, came to wish them "bon voyage." As she shyly gave him her hand, Archer raised it to his lips and endeavoured to thank her for all she had done, but, blushing, she snatched it away and was gone.

Jean, like Archer, had decided to go in uniform, "for this may be a fighting job," he said, "and if I have to hit a Boche it is well that he should know it comes from a French soldier. Also it may save reprisals against the inhabitants."

After a long tramp, they lay up before dawn under the tarpaulin on the top of a haystack, about a mile or more from the rendezvous, where they remained undisturbed throughout the day. As the sun went down the moon rose, but fortunately it was obscured behind a heavy bank of clouds.

"Come on," said Jean; "we must get to those trenches before the moon gets high;" and he led the way behind hedges to a point where Archer could see a green field about 400 yards across and lying somewhat below them. A party of Germans were apparently still at work, and the two had to wait some time before they saw figures leaving the trenches and going up the slope on the far side, where they disappeared into the wood. Jean, after watching for a few minutes, walked boldly out, saying: "Turn your cap round; they'll think we are part of the working party in this light;" and made

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straight for the nearest trench, along which he proceeded to walk. Suddenly he stopped and sank down, and Archer heard voices round the next traverse and the clatter of entrenching tools. Probably the last men straightening things up before going back to camp, thought Archer at the time; though in the light of subsequent events he came to the conclusion that they were sentries left for the night over the tools. Whoever they were, they were very distinctly in the way.

Seemingly they also had heard something, as one called out in German. Receiving no reply, he discussed the matter with a companion, and then Archer heard their footsteps advancing towards the traverse behind which the two were standing. Jean moved from the corner, sat down on the fire-step, and leaned back against the parapet in the shadow, motioning to Archer to do the same.

One man, then another, came round the corner, wearing steel helmets and carrying rifles. They stared at Jean and Archer sitting motionless, and then advanced uncertainly, drawing their bayonets and saying, "*Wer da?*" Our two friends sat as still as death, but when the Germans were well beyond the traverse, Jean sprang at the leading man and the two went down together at the bottom of the trench. Archer, to this day, does not clearly recollect what happened, but he remembers jumping on to the fire-step to get past at the second German, and

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dashing his club in the latter's face, just as he was making a lunge at the Frenchman in the bottom of the trench.

Two minutes later all was quiet, and the two, breathless and dusty but otherwise undamaged, were peering over the parapet in the direction of the wood, where, however, no alarm seemed to have been raised amongst the Germans, who appeared to be having a concert of some kind, judging from the harmonies which were wafted through the still night air.

They waited until nearly 11.30, and then they went cautiously along the trench till they were well in the middle of the field, and not more than 200 yards from the wood, where all was now quiet. Jean stopped where a high traverse concealed them from the wood, mounted the fire-step and drew out the electric torch, with which he was to warn the aeroplane to keep away.

The ground mist was lying in wisps, partially obscuring the features of the ground from the air, when they heard the distant drone of an aeroplane gradually getting louder. The moon was half veiled, but though it was quite light they could not see the machine. Then they heard the engine throttle down, and when Jean judged it was about within range he commenced to signal. To his dismay the torch made no response. It had been tested before they left the hay-rick, but evidently had been damaged in the recent struggle.

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Nearer and nearer came the machine, and suddenly it appeared almost over their heads and only some fifty feet up. Jean drew his pistol and fired rapidly in the air, but well below it. To Archer's intense relief the engine above opened out with a roar, and the machine commenced to rise rapidly; and, at the same time shouts were heard from the wood; whether as the result of the shots or from hearing the aeroplane he could not say. "Come on!" said Jean; "let's get out of this quick before they discover the dead Boches and that it was not they who fired at the aeroplane." And he led the way back along the half-finished trenches.

And here for the moment we will leave them, and return to the little school-house, and the day when the last pigeon reached the loft. As each preceding message had arrived it had become clearer that a movement of some kind was in progress in front of the British, but the numbers of the units given presented a puzzling problem, and furnished no clue as to the enemy's intentions.

Certainly there were two Divisions from the French front, but of the remainder, some corresponded to no known formations, whilst other units given were part of Divisions reported as having already been transferred to the Russian front. The messages were no doubt genuine, but it looked very much as if Jean Bart had somehow got mixed up.

But when the last message was opened by

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the Staff, there was a shout in the little upper room. "By Jove! This explains everything. The Boche has evidently formed three new Divisions from units which we thought had gone to Russia. And what is more, he has brought back two which left for Roumania ten days ago, and must have got half-way there. I'll bet they were pretty fed up when they were turned round again—just when they thought that they had got away from the Somme *blutbad* for good!"

"Yes," said another; "and they have reformed the First Army on our front, in spite of what the Russians said"—for A.O.K. 1 stood for *Armee Ober Kommando* (Army Head Quarters) of the First Army, reported to have gone to the Eastern front.

"Well, anyway, they would not have brought those two Divisions back unless our last push had given them a nasty shake up, and evidently they are pretty well down to bed-rock in the matter of men. If only the weather will hold up!"

"In any case," said another, "it ought to help Brusilov and the Roumanians, even if it hangs us up a bit—and, after all, it's all part of the same big show really." So the matter was discussed by the juniors, whilst the report was no doubt being considered more prosaically higher up.

Not particularly important information, you may say; but "mony a mickle maks a muckle," and the days have gone when a

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complete plan of his intentions can be abstracted from the coat pocket of the gentleman opposite. Like a jig-saw puzzle, it can only be divined by the intensive study and laborious piecing together of little pieces of information, frequently only obtainable at tremendous risk.

Jean and Archer's report may have been the deciding factor in shaping great events. This we cannot say; but we may be tolerably certain that the authorities attached great importance to it, for that was why Jean and Archer,—but that will appear later. Also why Grand'mère, released from a German prison after the armistice, looks proudly but sadly at the little case, containing the Cross of the Legion of Honour and a curl of brown hair, which hangs on the wall beside the stove in the old kitchen.

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CHAPTER VI.

JEAN AND ARCHER CHANGE THEIR QUARTERS.

We left "soldat" Jean Bart of the French Army and Lieutenant Archer of the British Flying Corps making their way in the moonlight, as fast as possible, from the German exercise-ground, where in one of the trenches lay the two dead German soldiers.

By the time they had reached the friendly shelter of the hedges, it was quite obvious that the encampment on the far side of the ground was humming like a nest of angry wasps, and parties of Germans with lamps were already on their way down to the trenches to investigate the shots which had been fired by Jean Bart. It was only a matter of minutes before they would discover the bodies of their dead comrades.

"They will see at once from the knife-wounds that the aeroplane did not do the trick," said Jean. "To make quite certain that they should not suspect the inhabitants, I left my 'kepi' in the trench, so we may expect a tremendous hue and cry after a

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hidden French soldier. We'll get back to the 'caves' in my village as soon as possible, but it won't be safe to stop there long. Come along!" It was now past midnight, the August dawn would be breaking in three hours, and they had eight miles to go. Jean led the way at a great pace, avoiding with the almost uncanny instinct of the smuggler the numerous parties of Germans, which were already scouring the country round the exercise-ground. However, once through them, they made their way without serious delay to the wood, in which was the ruined shrine and the hidden entrance to the "caves," and by daylight were safely installed in their hiding-place, close to the foot of the stairs leading up to the room in Adrienne's house, where the German Feldwebel was sleeping audibly.

"There's nothing more to be done now till about eleven o'clock, when we shall hear Adrienne sweeping out the German's room," said Jean; "and then we must decide our future plans. In the meantime you had better go to sleep."

Shortly after eleven, Adrienne's broom could be heard banging the furniture above, showing that the Feldwebel had gone out to his lunch. Jean mounted the steps and gave the signal, when they heard the chest of drawers on the trap-door being removed, and Adrienne's pretty face appeared, framed in the opening, as it seemed to Archer, like an angel of light.

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After their previous experience they decided not to go up into the house, but that Adrienne should make her way round by the wood and come in by the secret entrance, where Jean would meet her, and an hour later the three were in solemn conclave in the "caves."

Jean told Adrienne how they had saved the British aeroplane, but that the hunt was now likely to be hot and furious, and that they must get Archer out of the country as soon as possible. This would take a good deal of arranging, and meantime he did not at all like the idea of their staying where they were, as much on Adrienne's account as on their own. The secret of the "caves" might be given away at any time by one of the many inhabitants who were in the pay of the German Security Police.

Adrienne admitted that there was much truth in this, but protested vehemently that her safety should not be considered. "France has need of men to fight for her," said she. "There is little enough that a poor girl can do, and if I could be the means of sending back two soldiers to fight against our enemies —even though I perished in doing so—France would greatly gain, and I should indeed be proud. I have no fear, and I will not fail you."

She went on to say that the alarm was already abroad, as the Feldwebel, who worked at the *Kommandantur*, had told her that

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morning, that an urgent order had been received from Headquarters, cancelling all passes which permitted any inhabitants to go more than two miles from the village, and this would surely be followed by a house-to-house search. Also a reward of 5000 francs had been offered for information leading to the capture of an English aviator or a French soldier believed to be hiding in the neighbourhood.

On the strength of the Feldwebel's moral support in the matter of the last visit from the police, she had thought it wise to improve relations with that official. "He is a kind-hearted old man—for a German—and thinks only of the end of the war and of getting back to his family and his music shop, and within reason, I think he would help me at a pinch," said Adrienne. "And he's very useful in keeping me informed of what the Security Police are doing, so far as they know this at the *Kommandantur*."

"*Ma foi!*" said Jean, "that gives me an idea! Where should we be so safe as in my own house, the office of the *Kommandantur*, if only it could be worked? There is plenty of room for us in the double roof, where we used to keep the tobacco, and no one would ever think of looking for us in the actual office of the Town Major. The question is—can we get there unobserved; and once there, can we get out again when we want to? It all depends on what rooms the Germans are

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using, and whether they are occupied by day or by night."

Adrienne smiled, and remarked that the same idea had occurred to her.

In answer to Archer's inquiries, Jean explained the situation as regards his house.

It had four rooms on the ground floor, similar to Adrienne's house, two on each side of a centre passage, and one big attic above, reached by a staircase from the centre passage. The special feature was the double roof—a cunning arrangement for concealing tobacco, smuggled across the frontier in bulk, until it could be disposed of in detail. Unlike the "caves," its secret was known to no one outside Jean's actual band, who were all to be trusted. One of the side walls of the house was double, and in it were the steps by which the space between the two roofs could be reached. The entrance to these steps was covered by the false back to a large press, which filled the corner between the fireplace and the double wall. On the other side was a similar press, concealing nothing.

Archer would remember that steps led up from the "caves" to the floor of Jean's house, and these came out under the staircase in the central passage.

The two important points to discover then were, firstly, whether the trap-door under the stairs could be opened from below without assistance from above, since it had not

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been used for several years. There was also the possibility that the Germans might be using the cupboard under the stairs, in which was the trap-door, for storing kit. The second point was, whether the room, in which was the entrance to the steps leading to the roof, was accessible at any time during the day or night.

To Archer's surprise, Adrienne quietly observed that she could answer the questions at once. Whilst they had been away she had taken an opportunity to make a thorough reconnaissance of Jean's house. How had she managed it? "Oh, *bien simple*," she replied. "I hid the Feldwebel's razor, and of course he was in a terrible state of mind about it. Then, after he had gone to the *Kommandantur*, I found it; so naturally I had to hurry round to tell him. I looked in all the other downstairs rooms before I found him in the back room, but I could not go up to the attic nor look under the stairs, as there were men about the passage.

"Then I told him that the house belonged to a relative of mine, and that Grand'mère was very anxious to know if it had been much damaged, and might I just see, so as to reassure her?

"Well, I did see; and the cupboard behind the stairs was full of kit-bags, papers, and other German rubbish, and you can't get into the house that way without a confederate inside. Bars have also been fitted

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to all the downstairs windows to guard their nasty papers, I suppose. The room with the steps to the roof is used all day as the office of the clerks, including the Feldwebel. There is a bed in one corner, so evidently one man sleeps there at night. The press is empty, and one could otherwise get to the steps quite easily.

"The other back room is the telephone exchange, and the Town Major himself occupies the two front rooms. The orderlies sleep upstairs in the attic, and the barn is used as a garage and as a cook-house for the orderlies. Am I a good scout, Monsieur Archaire?" she added, smiling at the young Englishman.

"Mademoiselle is wonderful!" he replied; and the enthusiasm with which he said it brought a faint blush to her cheeks.

"So far so good," Jean said; "but how are we to get into the house? It is evidently no good trying to sneak in at night, as we should certainly be arrested before we got there. We've got to go in in daylight"—and Adrienne agreed. Finally a plan was settled upon, which was to be tried in two days' time, and Adrienne left shortly after to make the necessary arrangements, which required a certain amount of working out. In the meantime they were to burn their uniforms that night in the depths of the wood, and on the second day, to remove all traces of occupation from the "caves." The hiding of the ladder to the trap-door was

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also to be arranged for, as Adrienne was positive that the secret was certain to be given away, as soon as the reward became generally known.

In that case, the fact that the Feldwebel had been in constant occupation of the room might, it was foreseen, prove very useful to establish Adrienne's innocence of any connection with the secret passage.

Next day both Adrienne and Grand'mère complained of terrible earache. As they explained to the Feldwebel, when he inquired sympathetically, it was more or less hereditary. He really need have no anxiety as to its being contagious, and Adrienne hoped that he would not dream of leaving the house. They had not had an attack for a very long time, and attributed it now to poor feeding. If they could visit a certain doctor, who lived at Valenciennes, Adrienne thought that he would give them immediate relief—but that raised the question of getting passes, she added, tentatively.

The Feldwebel expressed a thousand regrets, but pointed out that all passes were stopped owing to the mysterious murders in the neighbourhood, and that he did not think there was any chance that the Town Major would make an exception in their case. Adrienne suggested that if there was no improvement to-morrow, perhaps, with Monsieur's assistance, it might at least be worth while to make the attempt. After all, the

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worst the Town Major could do would be to refuse.

The Feldwebel rather unwillingly agreed, and Adrienne returned to her fomentations, whilst Grand'mère groaned audibly in the bedroom behind the kitchen; but the distressing complaint did not prevent Adrienne a little later from handing down a bundle of clothes, which she gave with whispered instructions and much suppressed laughter. When opened out, Archer discovered that one bundle contained a selection of Grand'mère's clothes—apparently for Jean—and the other, a similar assortment of Adrienne's for himself.

Next day Grand'mère was confined to bed, but Adrienne, much of her face swathed in bandages, assured the Feldwebel that they would both be able to visit the *Kommandantur* during the afternoon, when he was to try and get them a pass. He still maintained that it was a forlorn hope, but Adrienne was firm in her intention to try. Would he not escort them from the house, as Adrienne was shy about going to the *Kommandantur* alone? —and he eventually agreed to take them between four and five o'clock.

By midday, Jean and Archer were in the back room, and when the Feldwebel arrived, he found Adrienne, still bandaged, waiting for him in the kitchen with Grand'mère, the latter also heavily bandaged under her poke sun-bonnet, whilst a shawl round her neck

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partly covered her mouth. The old lady was evidently very shaky as she tottered down the road leaning on Adrienne's arm. The Feldwebel addressed a remark or two to her, getting no reply; and Adrienne explained that she herself heard with difficulty, and that poor Grand'mère was practically stone-deaf for the time being.

Shortly after their departure a similar pair left by the back entrance and made for the rear of the *Kommandantur*, behind which they arrived as the Feldwebel and his party entered the front entrance, where the flying sentry passed some jocular remark to the Feldwebel about the beauty of his lady friends, which evidently rather annoyed that gentleman.

The Feldwebel knocked at the door of the Town Major's room, entered it, and shortly afterwards called to Adrienne and "Grand'mère" to join him. But in the meantime a commotion had arisen outside.

Adrienne was the first to notice it, and raised the alarm inside the house by shouting out that the garage was on fire, and as the Feldwebel, followed by the Town Major, came out into the passage, it was indeed only too obvious that one end of the barn was well alight.

Immediately the whole place was in an uproar, the Town Major shouting and cursing and calling every one to come out and help —which, as a matter of fact, was hardly

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necessary, as every German in the place was already making at top speed towards the fire to save his property.

"Grand'mère" suddenly became galvanised into life, and seizing two passes, stamped them with the Town Major's stamp which was on the table. Then she went to the back room, where she opened the door of the big press. At the same time, Adrienne made for the back door, where she met the real Grand'-mère and Archer, and directed the latter to the back room to join Jean, whilst the old lady went to the door of the front room. Then Adrienne and Grand'mère waited patiently in the passage till the Feldwebel and the Town Major returned, after saving the two cars in the barn and a fair proportion of the other German property.

Needless to say, the two did not get their passes, but were subjected to a great deal of abuse from the Town Major, who was a typical red-faced, thick-necked German. In fact, they were not at all sorry to get out of the building and back to their home, where they had a hearty laugh at the ease with which they had defeated the hated Huns by the aid of some small French boys, armed with nothing more deadly than a box of matches.

As it turned out, Jean and Archer had only changed their quarters just in time, for next day the two Security Policemen again presented themselves at Adrienne's house.

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When the latter, still bandaged up, went to the door to meet them, she observed over their shoulders the mean face of a certain woman, who was generally suspected of being in the secret pay of the enemy. The policemen's first question showed her that the game was up so far as the "caves" were concerned. "Has Mademoiselle any knowledge of any underground passages, and is there any connection with the house?"

"But certainly," replied Adrienne; "there used to be a smuggler's tunnel from this house, and I believe the entrance is in the Feldwebel's room, but it has not been used by the smugglers since the war, I think."

She took them to the back room, where she believed the entrance to be, but disclaimed any exact knowledge as to its whereabouts. However, by sounding, they found the trap-door, which being securely fastened, had to be cut out. They made their way into the caves, and eventually found the entrance to the cupboard under the stairs in Jean's house. But in both cases the evidence appeared conclusive that neither could have been used recently without the knowledge of the Germans, and the police were left baffled and disappointed, but with an uneasy feeling that they might be surrounded by hidden enemies and never know it.

Meantime, Jean and Archer were lying between the double roof over the attic. Archer found it comfortable, though rather

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cramped, and judged that it had been used before for a similar purpose, as there were look-out holes by which the attic beneath, as also the main road and the surrounding country, could be clearly scanned. As the attic was generally unoccupied during the day they could talk in whispers, which helped to pass the time, for Jean was a great *raconteur*, and had an unending fund of smuggling stories, of which he himself was usually the hero. He was particularly pleased with his presence of mind in taking the passes from the Town Major's table; quite an impromptu effort apparently, which might, so he said, save them a lot of trouble later on. By judicious filling in—for which he relied on Archer—the passes would take them across the Franco-Belgian frontier, which would otherwise have been a difficult proposition.

They could not, of course, use them for getting out of the village, as all the inhabitants were well known to the guards, and in any case all passes were stopped. However, that part ought not to be too difficult, as he knew the country; but from the frontier onwards across Belgium into Holland was another matter. However, "le Commandant" had given him some addresses before they crossed the lines in the aeroplane, and for the rest they must just trust to good luck and stout nerves.

They would have to stay where they were for two days, whilst Adrienne was making

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final arrangements for carrying on the intelligence work during their absence—and he explained the very delicate and intricate nature of the chain, which was on the point of completion up to the Franco-Belgian frontier, and which, somewhat to Archer's surprise, was very different to anything of which he had ever read in spy stories.

During the afternoon of the second day, from their look-out hole they saw Adrienne pass down the road and drop a sack which she was carrying.

"*Bon!*" said Jean; "she will meet us in the wood to-night, and then if all is well we start for Holland. We must just wait till the Boche in the back room is asleep before we open the door of the press, and then trust to luck to get away into the wood. Pray God it's not too light. As regards costume, I shall do fairly well as I am, being old enough to pass muster as unfit for any kind of service; but you, Monsieur Archaire, would be spotted at once as being of military age, so you shall continue to suffer from earache, which has affected both your hearing and your speech. We'll leave all these skirts and things behind us here, as they will only be in the way if we have to do any running."

That night, shortly before midnight, snores from the attic showed that at any rate the main body of the enemy was in the arms of Morpheus, and that there was a reasonable

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probability that the occupant of the bureau was also asleep.

Creeping down the steps they arrived in the press, and Jean, who was leading, carefully opened the door into the room an inch or two, and listened. All was still, save for the regular breathing of the occupant. Jean pushed the door more open, when, to their dismay, there was a resounding bang, as a rifle, which had been leaning against the cupboard door, fell on the ground, and a German on the bed on the other side of the room sat up.

Jean had promptly pulled the door to, and the two listened anxiously, hoping that he would lie down again and go to sleep. But evidently the German was not quite satisfied, as, after some little delay, he got out of bed and came across to the press. As he opened the door, Jean drove a knife into his heart, and he went down without uttering a sound. But though the crisis was averted for the moment, Archer felt that this development was not at all according to plan, and that their situation was a very awkward one.

Moreover, when he went to the back door he found that it was locked, and footsteps in the road showed that any exit by the front door was out of the question, at any rate for the time being. Obviously the first thing to do was to gain time by disposing of the corpse, and together they carried it into the press and half-way up the steps. They also

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put with it a small wooden box, which looked as if it might contain something of value, the idea being that for a few days at any rate it might be thought that the German had absconded.

They then stole out into the passage to see if Jean could make anything of the back door. But almost as they got there, they heard steps approaching the front door.

"Quick!" said Jean, as he opened the door of the cupboard under the stairs. "Get in!" and he followed and closed the door.

It was, of course, pitch dark inside, but Jean lit a match, and Archer could see that they were in a big cupboard or small box-room, half full, as Adrienne had said, of German kit-bags and boxes of documents, forms, &c., which had evidently been put back over the trap-door after the Security Police had made their abortive inspection. Meantime the visitor had entered the bureau, and not finding the usual occupant, was noisily mounting the stairs over their hiding-place in order to wake some one in the attic. It was evident that the dead man's absence would soon be discovered, and that there was no time to lose.

Jean whispered to Archer to clear the trap-door, and when this was done, they quietly made a pile of paper and placed kit-bags, &c., on the top. This was only the work of a few minutes, but by the time that the bonfire was ready, the men in the attic were

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evidently beginning to stir. Jean carefully lit it, bolted the door, and then, as the place filled with smoke, lowered himself through the trap-door, followed by Archer; and so through their old friends, the "caves," they made their way to the exit in the woods. As they emerged they could see a red glow over the village and hear a confused murmur of many voices.

"With any luck," said Jean, "the double walls will fall in and effectively cremate and bury our friend, Mr Boche. As they knew he was gone before the fire started, they are not likely to look for him in the ruins."

Then his mood changed, and wringing his hands, he said, "*Ah! Ma belle maison! ma belle maison!*"—for the burning of the ancestral home, which is almost sacred to a Frenchman, meant a very real sacrifice; and then his irrepressible sense of humour came to his aid, for he added with a chuckle: "I expect the red-faced Town Major's remarks would be worth listening to at this moment."

Near the shrine they found Adrienne, who had been watching the conflagration anxiously and listening to the noise in the village, wondering what it all meant. She welcomed them with obvious relief, and inspected their disguises thoroughly, adding some deft touches.

It did not take Jean long to give her his final instructions for the Secret Service organisation, and then the time came to part

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from the brave girl, who in staying was really facing the greater danger.

Archer was not ashamed of a tremor in his voice as he held her hand and murmured something about meeting her again *après la guerre.*

The girl, biting her lip, smiled bravely as she thanked him and wished him good luck; but he could see that she had no great confidence in their ever meeting again, though she assured him that as long as she lived she would not cease to pray for the safety of her brave English aviator.

They left her by the shrine, where she would wait until morning would enable her to steal home to Grand'mère.

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CHAPTER VII.

SOME SET-BACKS.

THIS is not a diary, and it is not proposed to weary the reader with details of the journey northwards of the elderly peasant and the half-witted youth; how they passed through the great Forêt de Mormal, which already was showing signs of the ravages of German woodmen in search of trench props; how they lay up on the side of the main railway artery which runs from Sédan through Hirson to Valenciennes, watching the long trains pass, and waiting for an opportunity to dodge across between the sentries which guarded this vital line.

On two occasions their passes got them out of difficulties, and eventually, after covering some forty miles, they slipped into Mons on the second evening with a crowd of miners, and went to an address which had been given to Jean by "le Commandant."

The occupant, a frail old padré, with the face of a saint and the heart of a lion, received them with enthusiasm, and from him

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they learnt details of the disasters which the Secret Service had sustained, and received much useful advice for their future guidance. Archer gathered that, generally speaking, things were a good deal easier in Belgium than in France, as the Germans were trying to conciliate the Flemish portion of the inhabitants and to pose as a paternal Government—in neither of which, however, were they meeting with much success.

He explained that they were now in another army area, and that their passes were a positive danger, so he exchanged them for forged papers which would take them to the outskirts of Brussels, and which experience had shown were generally accepted without question. With these they could travel by the "vicinal" railways, provided that they did not actually enter the big places—and he gave them some addresses at Hal and Brussels, where they could get help if they required it.

The following day they left, being blessed by the old man in a way which brought a lump to Archer's throat, and making their way out of the town in the cart of a peasant returning from the market, they boldly boarded the "vicinal" at a small wayside station, alighting at a similar station two or three miles out of Hal. They entered the historic town without mishap, and stayed the night with the widow of a Belgian officer, whose address had been given to them by the padré.

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From her they learnt that it would be dangerous to travel by train any farther with only the passes which they possessed, as the German police had been very active lately, owing to the arrest of spies and the large number of young Belgians who had been escaping into Holland *en route* to join the Belgian Army.

It was a perfect September morning when the two started out on the ten-mile tramp to Brussels, Jean whistling cheerily and Archer feeling that at last he was well on his way to freedom. As passing traffic, including official German cars, took no notice of them, his confidence rose still further. And this, no doubt, was the cause of their undoing, for when only about half the distance had been covered, they were suddenly called upon to stop by some German policemen, who had come up behind them in a car, and who had apparently noted the vigorous strides and military bearing of the two as being hardly in accordance with their otherwise woebegone appearance.

Fortunately they had been stopped at a place where a wood lined the eastern edge of the road, which, as is usual in Belgium, was marked by a low bank without any kind of fence.

"Run!" whispered Jean; and dodging behind the nearest trees, they plunged into the wood, followed by a fusilade from the police, and then by three of the men who

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jumped out of the car. Although the few days' exercise in the open air had done a certain amount to restore Archer's condition, he soon found that he was in no state to stand a long chase, and quickly began to show signs of distress.

Their pursuers were close on their heels, so Jean, observing that his bolt was nearly shot, motioned to Archer to head to the left, whilst he himself went to the right, making a great noise and successfully drawing away the pursuers.

Archer, thus left to himself, was in some doubt as to his best course of action. He had no idea as to the extent of the wood, and the police might return at any time, possibly with reinforcements, and then he would be caught like a rat in a trap.

He decided to put a considerable distance between himself and the car, and perhaps to return at night to try and find Jean. Making his way eastwards, he soon reached the far edge of the wood, from where he could see a large forest about half a mile away, across absolutely open cultivation, through the middle of which ran a railway. He remembered that this would be the Forêt de Soignies, which he had noticed on the map as being familiar to him from reading accounts of the battle of Waterloo.

As he had feared, the wood he was in was far too small to hide him for long, so he boldly walked out into the open, and had

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gone two-thirds of the distance when he heard shouts from the railway and saw that two of his late pursuers were already after him, followed by some men who had been working on the line.

Fortunately he had now got his wind again, whilst Jean had taken a good deal out of the police, and he gained the forest with a comfortable lead. Once in its friendly shelter he felt that he was fairly safe for the time being, and he proceeded eastwards in a more leisurely fashion.

Then he remembered his bandages. What a fool he had been not to take them off before, as they marked him out to his pursuers from a mile off.

At dusk, in pursuance of his intention to try and find Jean, he made his way back to the west edge of the forest and looked cautiously out. A German cyclist passed at that moment, and he heard him stop and talk to another German whom he could not see. Evidently the road was being patrolled, and it would be folly for him to attempt to get back to where he had parted from Jean. The only chance was to make his way to the Brussels address and wait for Jean there; so having come to this conclusion, he turned back into the wood, but soon found that he had no idea of direction, and he decided to try and sleep till daylight.

All next morning and afternoon he wandered in the forest, until in the evening he

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found himself near what was either a village, or possibly a suburb of Brussels. He waited till dusk, and then, feeling faint from want of food, he took his courage in both hands and entered the main street of what from a notice at the entrance he ascertained was Groenendael.

There were not many people about, and after some hesitation he selected a middle-aged woman dressed in black, evidently returning from shopping, and he followed her to a small villa. As she opened the gate into the little front garden, he went up to her, and taking off his cap, said: "Madame, I am an English Flying Officer, trying to escape to Holland, and very hungry."

The woman glanced hastily to right and left, saying: "Come in, Monsieur, quickly," and she opened the front door of what was evidently a small tradesman's house. Once inside she seized both his hands, saying: "Monsieur will be safe with me. How the Boches would love to catch him, for they are terrified of the English aeroplanes, and we Belgians accordingly love the brave English flying men!"

Her husband, who would shortly arrive from Brussels by the evening train, would also be delighted to hear all that was happening "over there." But Monsieur looked ill and tired, and so young too! "*Ah, le pauvre garçon!*" she would make him some hot food at once—but she could not offer him the

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hospitality she would like, as they were all on rations—and then he must go to bed and rest till the morning.

The husband arrived a little later, and from him Archer learnt that he could not travel by train without a pass, and that he also ought to have an identity card, which might be demanded at any time. The best chance of getting in safely was to take the tram which ran to the Schaerbeek quarter, where the street which Archer wished to reach was situated. At Madame's suggestion they fitted him out with old clothes of Monsieur's, for which the couple indignantly refused any payment, and which gave him the appearance of a struggling shop-assistant; and so attired, Archer next morning bade farewell to the courageous and kindly Belgians and boarded the tram for Brussels. The car was crowded, but nobody seemed to pay much attention to him, and he reached the point where he had been told to change without incident. By this time the streets were packed with people of every description, and as Archer stood waiting for his tram, he saw out of the corner of his eye two German policemen who, he fancied, were looking at him. He decided to shift his quarters at once, and jumped on to the first tram which passed, and which was full inside, so he had to stay on the platform at the back. The Germans jumped on after him, and whilst one went within to examine the passengers, the other, standing

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with his back to the interior, asked in French for Archer's papers. Archer moved his left hand towards his pocket as if to get them out, and as the man leant forward expectantly to receive them, the boy brought his right across with all his strength on to the German's jaw, sending him reeling back into the interior, where he fell full length over the passengers' feet.

The tram was travelling at top speed, but Archer jumped off, falling flat on his face, greatly to the amusement of the passers-by, who had not seen the episode in the tram. Then picking himself up, he walked quietly down a side road, round some blocks of buildings, and so to the Botanical Gardens. From there he kept to the main "Rue Royale," off which ran the street of which he was in search, and which he found without further trouble.

Number 15 was a dairyman's shop, over which was the name "Vanhuisen," and not the name given to Archer, which was merely Pierre. Archer walked past the door, and glancing over his shoulder, observed that inside behind the counter stood a fresh-complexioned girl, who certainly would not be Pierre.

However, he had no alternative but to follow his instructions, so, turning back, he walked in and said in his best French: "I wish to see Pierre," at the same time handing her half a five-franc note. It was an anxious

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moment, and his relief was intense when, without the slightest hesitation, she showed the way into a small back-room, before going upstairs to fetch her father, who Archer rightly concluded was Pierre, and who proved to be a burly, middle-aged man of strong Flemish type. To him Archer told his story, and was much depressed to learn that nothing had been seen or heard of Jean, though Pierre had received a warning from Holland that he might be coming through.

However, as the Belgian pointed out, it would take time to complete the arrangements for getting Archer across the Dutch frontier, and he might turn up in the meantime.

And this surmise proved correct, for two evenings later Jean appeared and was overjoyed to find Archer. He also had passed through the Forêt de Soignies, had been chased again and driven towards Louvain, and after covering some forty miles, had made his way into Brussels from the north. After hearing Archer's adventures, he congratulated him on his skill, and waxed very merry over the tram episode and the success of *la boxe*. It was lucky for Georges Carpentier and France that there was a war on! &c., &c., until Archer felt sorry he had ever mentioned the occurrence. But quite apart from this light badinage, he suggested that Archer could now take care of himself, and that he, Jean, should not cross the frontier, but return to Adrienne and prepare for Archer's next flight

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over the lines. The latter, however, pointed out that intelligence work was really not his business, and that it was very doubtful whether the authorities would let him cross the lines again in any case, since the facts of his escape into Holland—if they ever got there—would certainly be reported by German spies, and he would be a marked man.

Jean finally agreed that he would have to accompany Archer back to headquarters to talk things over with "le Commandant."

Some mornings later a milk cart left Brussels by the St Nicholas road, driven by an elderly countryman, beside whom sat a fresh-complexioned girl, whilst behind, with the milk-cans, was a youth dressed in a blue smock and chewing a straw.

The guards at the exit to the town found that the photos on the passes tallied with the bearers, and that the official stamps were perfectly in order; all of which proves that the Belgians had little to learn in the way of artistic forgery. The cart covered the twenty-five miles to St Nicholas that day, where the girl handed them over to a local grocer, of Dutch-Flemish extraction, whom we will call François, and who combined the smuggling of butter and other foodstuffs from Holland with work of some national importance, which was also a source of considerable profit to himself.

At a price, he was prepared to "pass" anything across the frontier in either direc-

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tion, from an egg to an escaped prisoner, and to this end he usually bribed the German guards with the butter and hams and other food for which their soul longed, and which he could well afford, since he made some 200 per cent clear profit on the remainder. At the same time it is only fair to add that he carried on a part of his business at the risk of his life—and, as he himself was wont to observe, "surely the labourer is worthy of his hire."

A prosperous-looking individual, whose rotundity was in marked contrast to the vast majority of the half-starved and anæmic population, he received Archer and Jean courteously, and at once got down to what promised to be good business. He explained that at the present time things were rather difficult, as, about three weeks before, a large party of young Belgians, instead of using his organisation, had decided to save their money and to force their way across the frontier, in doing which they had killed several Germans, with a loss of some ten of their own party. He hoped that this would be a lesson to any future amateurs, who might imagine that they could dispense with his expert assistance. Unfortunately, in addition to causing very strained relations all round, the German higher authorities had been very much annoyed, and a fresh regiment had been sent up from Beverloo to replace the old one, which had gone to the front—to its intense

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disgust. Some of the men had, in fact, deserted into Holland with his assistance—a *coup* of which he was particularly proud, as he had been paid by both the Germans and the Allies for the same service. The new troops were dismounted cavalry, and François so far had not been able to re-establish the cordial relations which had existed previously, to the great advantage of all concerned. Some of the guards were open to persuasion, but they wanted higher fees, and he himself had been compelled to raise his prices accordingly. Jean, as a brother smuggler, would appreciate the unfortunate necessity.

However, for 500 francs a head he thought he might be able to get Jean and Archer across in about a fortnight's time, when he would be organising a party. They must remember, he added, that Archer in particular would be a big prize for the Germans, and that the services which he proposed to render them were all the more valuable on that account.

Jean, who had been listening with growing indignation, could contain himself no longer, and burst out—

"Are there, then, no patriotic men in Belgium who are willing to take some risks for their country? We French smugglers have very different ideas!"

Archer, who saw that they could not afford to make an enemy of the man, calmed Jean, and told François that they would consider

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whether they could wait so long as was proposed, since he personally was anxious to get back to his squadron as soon as possible. Whether they accepted his help or not, Archer could assure Monsieur that he would not be the loser by anything which he might do to help them in the meantime, and amicable relations having been outwardly restored, the two retired to the cellar which had been placed at their disposal.

There Archer pointed out that 1000 francs was not a great sum for the British Government to pay, and that they actually had the money, but Jean flatly declined, so far as he was concerned, to put good money into the pockets of the "low hound." The attitude of that individual evidently, in his opinion, struck a blow at the prestige of the honourable trade of smuggling, and wounded Jean in a Frenchman's tenderest spot—his *amour propre*. That one smuggler should attempt to make money out of the safety of another, particularly in war-time, was unheard-of baseness, and he would never accept the help of such a person. In a day or two he would learn the ropes, and then they would teach that gentleman that dealing with a Frenchman was very different to making money out of Dutchmen or *braves Belges*.

It was a physical impossibility for Jean to sit quietly in one house for any length of time, and Archer did not see much of him for the next two days, though he imagined

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he was carrying out his intention of "learning the ropes." On the third day he gave Archer the result of his investigations, which were to the following effect.

The Dutch frontier was about nine miles away, and the intervening country was dead flat, mostly grass land, and much cut up by water-channels of every size and description. To approach within five miles of the frontier was absolutely forbidden, without going through formalities which were out of the question for them. On the frontier itself were two wire fences 100 yards apart, the intervening ground being quite bare. There were German pickets every 400 yards, search-lights about every half-mile, and—worst of all—the farther fence, which was six to eight feet high, was electrified, and to touch it meant certain death.

There were, however, ways of dealing with it, and the simplest seemed to be to throw two planks hinged together over the fence, so that the hinge rested on the top and the planks touched the ground on either side. Slats nailed across the planks would enable them to walk up and so over, and he had all preparations in train, so they ought to be able to start the following day. On that night a party of young Belgians were going to try and rush a German picket. If it came off it might help them—but he had no great confidence in these Belgians. Jean was in favour of going off without telling François.

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The latter might inform the Germans, he said,—for in Jean's opinion, he was capable of any baseness,—besides, they would thus avoid paying him anything, which would serve him right. This latter point of view did not, however, accord with Archer's conception of honesty.

So that night he told François that they were going to try to get across, as they could not wait for his party, and asked him what he would consider fair remuneration for the services he had rendered them, reaching an amicable settlement with unexpected ease, once the grocer saw that they really meant going, with or without his help. He was evidently anxious to keep on good terms with the British, as he begged Archer to tell their Intelligence Service that he was always ready to serve them, and that he knew of many excellent "tips" for getting messages across the frontier; which confirmed the impression already formed by Archer, that the aforesaid Intelligence Service carried a good deal of weight in those parts, and gave him confidence that they would meet with no further difficulties on their way to England once they got across into Holland.

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CHAPTER VIII.

OVER THE TOP.

NEXT afternoon a farm cart, full of straw from a local threshing-machine, made its way out of St Nicholas and along a narrow poplar-bordered road leading to the frontier village of La Clinge.

At one point it stopped, and our friends under the straw had some anxious minutes; but evidently the driver was a well-known local peasant, for after a perfunctory prod or two into the straw with a bayonet, one of which just missed Archer's leg, the cart was allowed to proceed.

After jolting along the road for about two hours it turned into a field, stopped near some ricks, and the driver removed some of the straw off the cart, when Jean and Archer emerged, very red in the face and picking straw out of their necks.

Keeping a sharp look-out on the road, the party then proceeded to empty the waggon, last of all pulling out a hinged plank, which they hid in a water-cut near by; and then

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they reloaded the waggon with corn for the return journey to St Nicholas.

Archer took stock of his surroundings, and found that they were to the east of the road leading into a village which, as Jean informed him, was St Gilles Waes. In every direction the country was cut up by parallel drainage channels, and he saw they were not going to have an easy job to make their way to the frontier in the dark, even with the aid of a compass, which Jean now produced and with which he took a bearing. They waited impatiently for several hours until it was nearly dark, and then commenced a wearisome tramp across the lush meadows, using the plank for crossing the smaller channels, which occurred almost every 100 yards, and heading for the line of searchlights, which presently began to flash at intervals away to the north. After what seemed like several hours of slow progress, they reached a fair-sized canal, which they had to swim, and Jean whispered that they were now quite close. Archer looked at his watch, and saw that they still had nearly an hour before the Belgians were supposed to be going to try and rush the post at La Clinge, and then they crawled cautiously forward till they reached the first wire fence, where, wet and shivering, they lay hidden in the long grass. When the searchlight came round, he could see that Jean's description had been correct, for in front the grass was cut fairly short, whilst

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beyond it the sinister electrified fence, with its thick power-cable along the top and the bare insulated wires below, stood out bright and gleaming against the blackness beyond.

Archer timed the searchlights, and found that they alternated from side to side about every two minutes. Theoretically they apparently were meant to be swung round together, so that the fence was always lighted; but in practice he noted that they were being carelessly worked, and that often for as long as half a minute the fence was in darkness. La Clinge was about half to three-quarters of a mile to their left, whilst 200 yards in the same direction was a picket of three men, and another picket about the same distance to their right, both fairly close up to the electrified fence, no doubt to enable them to fire towards Belgium rather than into Holland.

Presently a mounted man came along, probably an officer going his night rounds; and when he had returned towards La Clinge the anxious watchers saw the Germans begin smoking, and then one after another lie down. There was still no sign of any Belgian attack from the direction of La Clinge, though it was now considerably overdue, and as it was well past 1 A.M. it was high time for action. After a whispered consultation, they decided to try and rush one of the pickets, as being easier than trying to get across between them, and perhaps having to tackle two

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coming from opposite directions. Also to their right was an old watercourse, which had been badly filled in and which gave a certain amount of cover, running as it did from their fence to within ten yards of the picket on their right front and on its far side. Cautiously they crawled round through the grass to the end of the depression, and as the lights went off, wriggled through the fence and lay down until the beam had again passed and gone. In the next dark interval they got half-way across; Jean leading, pistol in one hand and the hinged end of the plank in the other, whilst Archer carried the rear ends. The next advance took them to within thirty yards of the picket, which still showed no signs of having observed them, and they waited breathlessly for their final rush until the light had gone. It passed, but as they rose, shots rang out to their left, and a confused babel of voices from the direction of La Clinge told them that the Belgian "push" had started. Instantly the picket jumped up and seized their rifles, and round came the searchlight on the right, fortunately full in the eyes of the Germans, who had already turned to meet the unexpected attack. Jean's pistol barked and one went down. Then, as he and the remaining two Germans fired simultaneously, a second German fell, whilst Jean's pistol was shot out of his hand. "Run for the plank!" said Jean, and when Archer, returning, threw it over the fence, he

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saw three more Germans about 300 yards away on the right running towards them, and Jean struggling with the third man of the first picket close to the fence a few yards away. As Archer was on the point of going to his assistance, Jean, with a mighty heave, hurled the big German against the electric wires. There was a blinding flash, and the German crumpled up in a sickening fashion. "Over you go!" shouted Jean; and as Archer made the perilous ascent, a bullet, and then another, whistled past his head. Had the Germans not stopped to fire at Archer they might have made certain of Jean, but as it was, the latter got over with a bullet through his coat and a sprained hand, giving a final derisive shout of "*à bas les Boches!*" as he reached the ground and made off into Holland.

Only the spoils of war in the shape of two planks and one damaged pistol remained in the hands of the discomfited Germans, and these the two brothers-in-arms were content to have exchanged for the decorations which they received at a private investiture a week later.

When they related their experiences to "le Commandant" at headquarters, there was only one point on which they did not and never could agree; for whilst Archer considered that the Belgian "push" actually helped them, Jean was most emphatic that the unpunctuality of *les Braves* nearly cost the two their lives.

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But then, Jean's view was, perhaps, distorted by recollections of a certain half-bred Belgian grocer, who had the impertinence to call himself a "brother smuggler"; whilst Archer, on the other hand, had tender memories of the courageous and kindly folk who helped him in his great need.

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CHAPTER IX.

A CHECK.

THE autumn rains had begun to fall in drenching torrents, turning the fields into sticky mud through which the young corn was already beginning to sprout. Up in the battle line the grim struggle still went on in conditions of ever-increasing difficulty. The insatiable mud swallowed up millions of rounds of ammunition, whilst countless bully-beef tins, hand-grenades, and stores of every description sank into the morass without affecting its appetite, whetted incessantly by the opposing artillery.

The struggling pack-animals, which fought their way forward night after night over the shell-torn ground, were bogged in ever-increasing numbers, and the heavily-laden infantry, winding their way up the flooded communication trenches, began to arrive at their destination only to find that some of their number had disappeared *spurlos* into the slough of despond. Every vestige of green had long since disappeared, and only

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a few giant tree-stumps broke the monotony, whilst the shattered landscape presented an indescribably woebegone appearance.

Adrienne's reports, which at first had come regularly, had ceased to arrive, and the gravest fears were entertained at Headquarters as to her fate ; but in accordance with arrangements made with her by Jean, pigeons were to be dropped on one of three nights when the moon was full. In ordinary circumstances, and in view of the fact that the story of our friends' escape was all over Holland, Archer would not have been allowed to make the flight, for if he was caught there was no knowing whether the Germans would treat him as a spy or not. However, only he could find the rendezvous, and Jean was quite definite that he would go with no one else. Moreover, the boy was both willing and anxious to go, and his offer was eventually accepted, there really being no alternative. It was a forlorn hope, for the season was far advanced, and, indeed, on the first two nights, rain and clouds rendered any flying out of the question.

The third and last night was little better, and the Squadron Commander was very averse from making the attempt.

Archer's anxiety, however, was at least equal to Jean's, for he felt that no risk would be too great to let Adrienne know that they had reached home, and that she was not deserted.

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Eventually the Squadron Commander yielded to their urgent entreaties, and the flight was made, only to prove that that officer's judgment had been correct; for, after being in the air some three hours and completely losing their way, they were fortunate to land at an aerodrome a long way from their starting-point. Of Adrienne's signal they had seen no sign, even if, as was doubtful, they ever reached the rendezvous, and they could only hope that news of the passing of an aeroplane might somehow reach her, and hearten her in her dangerous task.

For the moment there was nothing more which could be done, for the state of the ground rendered any attempt at landing away from an aerodrome a risky business by day, and sheer madness by night. Later, when the ground froze, conditions might be more favourable, and, in the meantime, experiments were to be carried out with other methods of communication, some of which will appear later.

Archer had no place in these schemes, for his worst fears were verified, in that he was told that he would not be allowed to fly across the line again for a long time to come. In fact, there was some talk of his being sent to another theatre of war altogether, which was the last thing that any first-class pilot wanted. Besides, he had an additional reason for wishing to stay on the Western Front, though he himself hardly realised it. Also

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"le Commandant" had hinted that perhaps he might be wanted again later on for something of the same kind—if he would like to go.

Would he not indeed!

After some days of awful doubt he was placed on duty as one of the "ferry-pilots," whose business it was to bring across from England to France the new machines, which were required daily in large numbers to replace the terrible wastage on the battle front. It was thankless work, not free from danger, and entailing much standing about at Lymphe waiting for passably favourable conditions in which to cross the Channel; followed, when successful, by a dash for Boulogne and an uncomfortable journey back on the crowded steamer to Folkestone.

The only tinge of real excitement at Lymphe was provided all too rarely by rumours of a Zeppelin in the neighbourhood, when there was a general scramble for the available machines, in the hope of being the first to have a chance of "downing" it. But even this palled, when it was seen that the news was invariably false, and that no "Zep." had any intention of coming near this hornets' nest.

To the other boys in the mess, who regarded him with respect as a pilot who had "made good," Archer appeared to be his old cheery self—though certainly he did not join in the occasional jaunts to town, where any superfluous cash was effectively disposed of, in

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the minimum of time, to the complete satisfaction of all concerned.

He thought a good deal about Adrienne during this period, and he longed to see again her delightful smile and hear her pronounce his name in her funny, fascinating manner. But he saw nothing of Jean nor of any one who would be likely to give him any news of her, and he did not venture to make any inquiries on such a delicate subject.

Yet he had a firm and constant hope that the time would come when his services would again be required; and though he ached to be back at the front, he carried on conscientiously and without complaint, determined to be ready for "the day"!

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CHAPTER X.

ADRIENNE CARRIES ON.

ADRIENNE spent the days after the burning of Jean's house and the escape of Jean and Archer in a state of extreme nervous tension. To her intense relief, Jean's hope, that the double walls would collapse on to the dead Boche, had been almost miraculously fulfilled; and though to her, as she passed down the road, the secret seemed painfully obvious, the Germans did not seem to notice that there was anything special about the appearance of the ruins.

There was, of course, a great deal of discussion amongst them as to the cause of the fire, coming as it did so soon after that of the garage; but when Adrienne casually suggested to the Feldwebel, that perhaps a deserter had done it to cover up his tracks, that worthy, to her joy, remarked that he thought it was very probable, for his clerk had been missed just before the fire started. As he lived near Malmedy, he probably had French connections; besides,

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he hated the Town Major, who bullied all his staff.

Whether this idea was generally credited or not, it did not prevent the Germans from persecuting the unfortunate inhabitants to the full limit of the official regulations, which afforded considerable scope to such an enthusiast as the Town Major. He had lost most of his possessions in the fire, and was particularly offensive, taking a savage delight in carrying out *perquisitions* after the villagers had gone to sleep, pulling them out of bed, and making them stand out in the cold whilst their cottages were turned upside down. This happened twice to Adrienne; and as the Town Major was evidently struck by her attractive appearance *en déshabille*, it would probably have happened again, had not Major von Brittstein been disturbed on the second occasion, and given the Town Major to understand in no indefinite terms that, whatever he did in other houses, he must in future leave his billet alone.

He concluded a fine peroration by asking the Town Major what the German Army was coming to, when a *verdammter schweinhund* of a reserve officer had the impertinence to wake up a regular officer of the General Staff!

As she listened, Adrienne felt that she almost liked the arrogant Prussian, for now she knew that she could be away from the house at night, without any fear of her

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absence being discovered; and she proceeded to take full advantage of the fact.

At regular intervals during the following fortnight she met her confederates in the wood, and two sets of reports were despatched and duly reached "le Commandant" at Headquarters some five days later, by a channel too intricate to be described in detail.

Then there came a night when Adrienne waited in the wood in vain, for no one arrived.

She returned home in great despondency, only relieved by the thought that apparently for the moment there was nothing of special importance to report, for the long marching columns had ceased to pass, and calm had again descended on the little village. True, the villagers were still ordered to put water out at night, and all blinds had to be down after 7 P.M., but she had managed to elicit from the Feldwebel that, in his opinion, this was merely *camouflage*, and that the movement was certainly over for the time being.

Still, she had the wit to know that negative information might be quite as valuable as positive information; besides, she was helpless should she get any important news, for her chain of communication to the Franco-Belgian frontier was broken, and she could see no possible means of re-establishing it. There was the off-chance of getting some pigeons by air, but that could not happen for many days to come.

There was also the haunting fear that at least

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some of her confederates had been arrested, and that under the German system of "peaceful persuasion," which had broken the resolution of so many other patriots, they, too, might disclose information which would leave blanks for ever in many of the smugglers' families.

For her own safety she did not greatly trouble, since she had long since faced and accepted the fact that the work on which she was employed could have only one end. Her duty to her country, however, demanded that the end should be postponed as long as possible.

Her distress was increased by the news which the Feldwebel imparted the following day. Apparently the German reinforcements were already melting away in the fiery furnace, without having appreciably restored the situation, or else they were being taken away to some other front, for the inhabitants of villages farther west were actually being removed into the interior. Thus the pitiful scenes, which wrung the hearts of the "Old Contemptibles" during the great retreat from Mons, were again enacted, as the miserable villagers trudged along the churned-up roads, or across the muddy fields, endeavouring to save a moiety of their household goods in every kind of ramshackle conveyance, including wheelbarrows and perambulators. In some respects the droves were even more pathetic than in 1914, since only the very

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old or the very young were included in the mournful processions, whilst all the able-bodied of both sexes were retained for forced labour.

Nor was this the only sign which foreshadowed an impending change, for roads and bridges were being mined, and, not many miles to the west of the village, fresh lines of entrenchments were being constructed with feverish energy.

All this pointed to the possibility of a German withdrawal in the not far distant future, and Adrienne felt that the information was of vital importance to her friends on the other side.

She had yet another shock when she heard that Major von Brittstein would be leaving the following day for Brussels, and with him her sole protection against the advances of the Town Major, whose intentions had become increasingly clear, and whose prospective visits, if they had no worse consequences, would prevent her leaving the house at night.

She pondered long and anxiously as to how she could get the great news through to Maubeuge, whence the chain might still be intact. It was quite hopeless for her to beg of the Town Major a pass for herself, since the last thing which would commend itself to that official would be to assist her to escape from his clutches. Now that her confederates had vamished, she knew of no one amongst her acquaintances who would make

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the journey, and the post was, of course, out of the question, since letters seldom reached their destination, and besides, were thoroughly censored and invariably delayed during operations. Finally, she came to a decision, and characteristically it was a bold one.

To the Feldwebel she went in great distress. She had received very bad news of some one at Maubeuge—some one who was more than a friend. He had been ill for a long time and she could get no word to him. If only he could know that she was safe and well, it might make just all the difference—better still, if she could only see him! Alas! but that was impossible—unless she could get there in a German car. Did they ever give a lift to a French girl? did he think that Major von Brittstein could help her?

The Feldwebel was quite emphatic that nothing—at least, nothing which she would be likely to offer—would induce a Staff Officer to take her in his car on any consideration; and this was precisely the point which Adrienne wished to discover, for she had no intention of trusting herself to the tender mercies of this particular officer, which would probably have led her in quite a different direction to what she had in mind.

When the Feldwebel had gone, Adrienne wrote a passionate letter to her beloved "Paul," begging him to let her know how he was, indicating certain remedies, but, above all, that he should keep warm now that the

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autumn rains had set in—the sort of foolish letter, in fact, which love-lorn girls are in the habit of writing to the unworthy object of their affections.

Then with milk she wrote her news very carefully between the lines. It was a dangerous medium, for it would react to the most elementary tests of the German censorship, but she had no other; and besides, she had never before sent any communications in invisible ink, and it had to be something which would show up when heated, or the recipient would be none the wiser.

Then she put on her most becoming frock, and knocked at Von Brittstein's door.

In reply to a gruff "*herein*," she entered to find that gentleman engaged in packing up his papers. He was evidently astonished and somewhat taken aback at the unusual intrusion, for Adrienne had always studiously avoided him; but it was not easy to be rude to such a pretty picture, and with unusual courtesy he asked her what she wanted.

She told her pitiful story about the young man at Maubeuge, who was more than a brother, and then seizing his hand, begged him to take her in his car. Von Brittstein had some of the instincts of a gentleman, and though he brusquely refused to even consider such a thing, he became more and more embarrassed as she still persisted in her appeal, finally bursting into tears. Ultimately he reluctantly yielded to the extent of saying

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that he would deliver a letter for her, provided that it was open, and that he was satisfied it contained nothing contrary to the censorship rules. He would be leaving early the next morning, and she must give it to him that night.

Having obtained this concession, Adrienne proceeded to explain the exact location of the young man's house, but in so involved a manner that the Major could not make head or tail of her directions; so she then said that if he would just give it, as he passed, to a certain man, who lived near the sally-port at the entrance to the town, the latter would deliver it. To this the Major thankfully agreed, as being a simple way out of the difficulty, and to put an end to an interview which, if prolonged, might lead him into further breaches of his own regulations.

In fact, both parties to the deal were almost equally pleased when it was concluded, for the young man and the address existed only in Adrienne's fertile imagination, whilst the man at the sally-port was probably the nearest surviving link in the broken chain.

We have said that the Major had some of the instincts of a gentleman, and we must add that he was not the finished article, for he exacted a tribute from the pretty French girl when she gave him the letter. Still, she felt as she scrubbed her face afterwards that, even so, she had had considerably the better of the bargain, for she knew that she could

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trust his word that he would carry out his share of the bargain, particularly now that he had received payment in advance.

Thus it was that an officer of the German General Staff carried to the British Intelligence Service the first indications of the great withdrawal which took place that winter, and, moreover, got the message through twenty-four hours quicker than would have been possible by any other means. By mere intuition Adrienne had unwittingly proved a truth, which is well known to more experienced people, that the higher the official, the greater is usually his disregard for the elementary rules of secrecy and security, particularly where the fair sex is concerned—otherwise the political tea-party would be but a comparatively dull affair, and diaries would be out of fashion.

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CHAPTER XI.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST.

After Von Brittstein's departure, the Town Major did not allow the grass to grow under his feet, for the Feldwebel announced the following morning that "Don Juan" intended to install himself in Adrienne's house forthwith. Worse still, the Feldwebel was to remove himself elsewhere, and the good-hearted man was deeply distressed, more on Adrienne's account than on his own; for he had no doubt as to the object of the manœuvre, but was powerless to intervene. He could only advise Adrienne to keep her door locked whenever "Grand'mère" was absent, and, of course, to avoid the Town Major as much as possible.

But if the person to be avoided lives in the same small house, such advice is easier given than followed, particularly when one party is obstinately intent on the exactly opposite course, as was perfectly obvious from the moment the Town Major entered the house and encountered her in the passage.

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"Ho, ho! my pretty one," said he, attempting to chuck her under the chin; "where has the beauty of the village been lately? Mademoiselle is coy; perhaps she is not accustomed to receiving attentions from a Prussian officer, but she will soon find how far preferable they are to the clumsy compliments of the rustic villagers. Mademoiselle's education will now proceed rapidly, and when she accustoms herself to the honour, we shall be great friends, eh?" And he leered at her like the disgusting brute he was.

Adrienne lowered her blazing eyes and retired hastily, murmuring that Grand'mère was not well, and that she was much occupied in looking after her—but she hoped that *Monsieur le Major* would be comfortable.

He laughed coarsely, and with the heavy courtesy of the German lady-killer, assured the *gnädiges Fräulein* that, with her assistance, he had every intention of being so; and as she shut the door she could hear him still laughing loudly at his own pretty wit.

That night she lay awake, anxiously thinking how she could escape from this new danger, until stentorian snores reassured her that, for the moment, there was no cause for fear, and exhausted, she too dropped off into a troubled sleep.

The ensuing days were for her a perfect nightmare, and eventually, as no rebuff appeared to penetrate the Prussian's pachydermatous self-assurance, she was compelled

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to take refuge in her old complaint, acute earache.

Constant anxiety had long since stolen the roses from her cheeks, and with draggled hair and heavily-bandaged face, she flattered herself that she presented a sufficiently unattractive appearance to cool the enthusiasm of even the most ardent admirer.

And for a time this worked; and she rejoiced, because the full moon was approaching, when she must go out to signal to the aeroplane, which was to bring the pigeons. What she would do with them if she got them, she had no very clear idea, but she thought how alarmed and disappointed "Monsieur Archaire" would be should there be no one at the rendezvous; and her loyal heart determined her to take a risk which sound judgment should have rejected. Youth is youth, and eighty miles away Archer, as we know, was urging to be allowed to make the flight for precisely similar reasons—all of which only shows how dangerous a thing it is to allow sentiment to enter into the stern business of war.

On the first of the appointed days she laid her plans carefully, and retired to bed in the morning on the pretence of her ear being worse; for the Town Major was showing alarming symptoms of a renewed intention to press his suit.

Then, as she had a long way to go, she watched her opportunity to slip out of the

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back window as soon as it was dark, and succeeded in reaching the woods unobserved, whence she made her way at best speed towards the rendezvous, some six miles away. The night, which had never been very promising, gradually changed for the worse, heavy clouds coming down low and rain beginning to fall. She knew very little about aviation, but in her heart of hearts she must have guessed that there was little chance. Still, with supreme confidence in the prowess of "Monsieur Archaire," she went on, hoping against hope.

Having reached the appointed place, she carefully arranged the bundle of kindling wood which she had brought, and over it placed the driest sticks she could find, until she had prepared quite a respectable-sized pile. The arrangement made with Jean before his departure was that she was to light up only when she heard the aeroplane; but as time passed, no sound was heard, and the weather got thicker, in desperation she at last lit her bonfire, in the vague hope that it might perhaps help to guide the machine to where she was watching and waiting.

Archer, as we know, had never started, and at last the poor girl was forced to abandon hope and to set out reluctantly on her long tramp for home, in order to get in before her absence was discovered in the morning.

Worn out in body and soul, she at last

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reached the house, to find Grand'mère in the depths of despair.

It appeared that, about 10 P.M., the Town Major had knocked at the locked door of their room, as indeed he had done on previous occasions; but this time he had apparently been drinking, and declined to accept the old lady's refusal to admit him, threatening to break it down unless he was allowed to see Adrienne at once. To all Grand'mère's entreaties he had proved obdurate, and eventually carried out his threat with much violence and bad language.

She graphically described his astonishment and rage at discovering that Adrienne was not there, and the terrible things he promised to do, unless she at once told him where the girl was, which latter she professed to being unable to do, saying that probably Adrienne had been out after curfew and had had to stay the night with a relation. She very much doubted, however, whether he altogether believed this, and evidently he was mad with jealous suspicion.

Eventually he had gone back to his room, promising that there would be further unpleasant developments in the morning when Adrienne returned.

Whilst this story was being told, the disciple of Bacchus was still snoring audibly, so "Grand'mère" was despatched to a neighbour, to tell her to swear that Adrienne had spent the night at her house, which the good

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woman promised to do, thereby somewhat relieving Adrienne's more immediate anxiety. There was nothing else to be done but to wait for the coming storm, which duly broke in the course of the morning.

The Town Major, secure in the possession of all the trump cards, made no secret of the fact that he was now entire master of the situation, so far as Adrienne was concerned.

Certainly for a few moments he lost some of his assurance, when she offered to prove conclusively that she had slept at a neighbour's house; but this did not explain her sudden recovery, nor in any way excuse a breach of the regulation which compelled every villager to be in his or her own house after curfew.

Punishment for the offence rested entirely in his hands; and, as a matter of fact—so he informed them—he had just received orders to collect a permanent working-party from the able-bodied villagers, which was to be sent some fifty miles away to work on fortifications. Mademoiselle was eminently able-bodied—and he looked her up and down as a prospective buyer does a horse,—she would make a fine pioneer, and it would certainly be his painful duty to include her in the party, unless——; and his look left no doubt as to the alternative.

The party would leave that evening, and she must decide by 4 P.M. whether she would abandon Grand'mère or stay—on his condi-

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tions. Adrienne was too proud to make any appeal, even had she thought that there was the slightest chance of success, and misinterpreting her silence, he left what he imagined were two thoroughly cowed and terrified women, and evidently quite confident that the girl could never bring herself to abandon the poor old woman.

In forming this opinion he displayed the usual German inability to appreciate the psychology of other races, for even had Adrienne been willing to make the sacrifice, the proud old Frenchwoman would rather have died than have permitted it. Actually the question was barely discussed, since Adrienne had but little time in which to make the arrangements to enable Grand'mère to carry on after her departure; for the old lady had depended very greatly on her capable grand-daughter.

Then, in preparation for the journey and for an indefinite period in camp, the latter had to collect a few necessaries—which must be reduced to a minimum, as she would probably have to carry them herself—and it needed a good deal of discussion and thought before the bundle in the old shawl presented the best compromise between the much which was required and the little which could be carried.

So the time passed all too quickly to allow of fruitless repining. Indeed, now that Adrienne had made her choice, their chief

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anxiety was lest the Town Major should endeavour to evade the issue, which he himself had forced on them, and substitute some more painful alternative.

If so, it was difficult to see how they could keep him to it, and they could only rely on Adrienne's quicker wit, as compared with the ponderous mental processes of their enemy.

It was barely 4 P.M. when they heard heavy steps coming along the road, followed by the clang of rifles, as an armed party was halted outside the house.

Quick as thought Adrienne jumped up, and followed by Grand'mère carrying the bundle, went to the front door to face the Town Major, who was mounting the steps, whilst the three or four soldiers looked at her with languid interest. Apparently he had brought them as escort, fondly imagining, no doubt, that their appearance would strike terror into the girl's heart, and overcome any lingering reluctance in her mind. True, he had not intended actually to interview her in their presence, but as she stood squarely in the doorway above him, and showed no inclination to let him pass without actual violence, he somewhat weakly gave way, and opened his attack in the presence of the escort.

In these circumstances he could not, of course, put his question quite as plainly as he would have liked, but with what he imagined to be great diplomacy he thus

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addressed her: "You have broken the regulations of the —— German Army by being absent from your house after curfew, without the permission of the *Kommandantur*. Your explanation has not been entirely satisfactory, and unless you are ready to state freely everything which you know about the matter under discussion this morning, it will be my painful duty to hand you over to this escort for conveyance forthwith to the labour gang now assembling at the *Kommandantur*. Choose!" And he twisted his moustache with the confident swagger of the successful bully.

He had not long to wait for his answer, for Adrienne, taking her bundle from Grand'-mère, looked him straight in the face, and in a clear voice, which all could hear, replied simply: "I am ready to start at once, Monsieur," saying which she stepped past him into the road and went up to the escort.

Almost foaming at the mouth at the complete downfall of his hopes, the Town Major could have cursed aloud both her and all her family, but he was not sufficiently nimble-witted to deal with this unexpected *dénouement*, and, like all Germans, had a supreme horror of making himself ridiculous before his subordinates. He could see no way of withdrawing with dignity from the position into which his over-confidence had placed him, and could only relieve his feelings by shouting at the escort to march her away,

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and telling Grand'mère that, unless she was very careful, she would soon follow.

So Adrienne started out bravely on her unknown journey, torn like so many other French girls of every class of society from the bosom of their families, to be herded together in conditions which will go down to history as a lasting disgrace to the nation which perpetrated such an atrocity in a civilised country.

As the convoy left the village, the kind-hearted Feldwebel managed to say a hasty good-bye, and whispered to her that he would do his best to look after Grand'mère whilst he remained there—though, of course, he had no idea how long that would be.

To Adrienne, her forcible removal from her post of danger was a knock-down blow, and if wishes could have killed, the Town Major would have had a speedy demise. But there is a silver lining to every cloud; and though this point of view did not at the time appeal to Adrienne, there is no doubt but that after the removal of her confederates, she could have accomplished very little, and in attempting to carry on the work would inevitably have put the halter round her own neck.

Providence works through strange instruments, and in this case the Town Major's revenge was actually the means of preserving Adrienne for work of greater importance than anything which she could have accomplished near her own village.

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This, however, was not to happen for many months to come, and in the meantime she was to experience a period of great hardship.

During the sad pilgrimage there was one gleam of light, for on the night of arrival at their second camp, Adrienne, lying awake on the hard floor, heard the drone of an aeroplane in the distance, and her thoughts flew to Archer. Though it would not actually be him, she thought, far as it was from his proper course, still it could only be an English pilot who was out at such a time, and the midnight voyager seemed somehow to carry a message of hope.

High endeavour seldom goes unrewarded, and Archer's bold attempt to carry out his promise and to reach the rendezvous, though it failed to achieve its primary object, was not entirely a wasted effort.

The labour gang, to which Adrienne was attached, numbered some three hundred souls of both sexes, the girls, however, considerably preponderating. At night they were accommodated in rough huts surrounded by barbed wire, with little or no regard to ordinary decency, and at dawn were driven out like cattle from pens to the scene of their labours. The food was barely sufficient to keep body and soul together, and totally inadequate for the class of work which they were called upon to do. Adrienne, who was a country girl and accustomed to a certain amount of manual labour on the farm, stood it better

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than some of the unfortunate women, who had been torn away from Lille, many of whom had been nurtured in conditions of comparative luxury and comfort. These latter found the straw on the hard floor a very poor substitute for their feather beds, and the absence of any real privacy was a terrible trial for all, seeing that in the same gang were persons of the lowest type, swept up from the purlieus of Roubaix and Turcoing. This flotsam and jetsam of city life were not averse to making things as unpleasant as possible to their associates of more fortunate upbringing, and Adrienne's attractive appearance drew down on her a certain amount of unwelcome attentions, particularly from the opposite sex, both German and French.

Unconsciously she contrasted this with the perfect courtesy and consideration which she had received from Archer, who had never shown the slightest inclination to take advantage of his position; and the comparison tended to brighten the halo which he was beginning to wear in her imagination.

However, she was gradually able to improve her position, for her strength of character attracted other girls of gentler birth, and they soon formed a group for mutual self-protection, which presented a united front to attacks from any direction. She also learnt that at least some of her confederates had been rounded up into similar labour

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gangs, which removed the great fear from her mind that they had been arrested for espionage. This being so, there was no reason to suppose that her whole chain of communication had been rolled up by the enemy, and it meant that, in all probability, the friend at the sally-port had been at his post when the German Staff Officer passed, and that her last report had gone through to the Allies. As she saw the extent of the preparations being made for the provision of rear lines of defence, she felt more than ever convinced of the importance of the information contained in that message.

Weeks, lengthening into months, passed with deadly monotony in the labour camp, the only variation being spells of abnormally wet or cold weather, and the periodic disappearance of some unfortunate, whose stamina proved insufficient to compete with the conditions of life. Sometimes fresh recruits were added to bring the gang up to strength, and, to Adrienne's joy, one day a member of the smuggler's inner circle arrived, by name Jaspar Degoutte. He had been conscripted into a working-party farther south, which was now broken up, and he brought news that Grand'mère was still at the old home, that the Town Major had been transferred soon after Adrienne's departure, and that a new man reigned in his stead. This was good news, for she had always feared that her enemy might make things extremely

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unpleasant for the old lady after she had gone. Apparently, however, his roving fancy had soon lighted on another maiden of the village, who, unlike Adrienne, had not been entirely without protectors. The Town Major had been stabbed, unfortunately not very severely, and the brave lad who had done the deed, before his execution had made out a case against the elderly *roué*, which the higher authorities could not possibly overlook. As a result, that official had been removed in disgrace, and placed somewhere else in a subordinate position, where his unpleasant propensities would be kept under proper restraint; for it is only fair to the German authorities to say that, after the madness of the first few months of the war, they by no means encouraged indiscriminate licence on the part of the soldiery, and that in the majority of cases these latter behaved with comparative propriety, increasing proportionately as their chances of victory diminished. So complete is the German's capacity for self-deception, that many of them, towards the end, actually hugged the amazing delusion that after the war they would be welcomed back as honoured guests! However, this is a digression.

Jaspar was a great support to Adrienne and her friends. He generally contrived to be working somewhere near them, and they frequently discussed the possibility of escape, but always to come back to the same diffi-

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culty—viz., what were they to do if they did get away?

Adrienne could not go home without involving Grand'mère in danger of arrest, nor could she do any real service to the Allies, for in all probability her system was by now completely broken up, and she was entirely out of touch with her friends across the line. Even if she escaped into Holland, she had no idea what she should do when she got there. On the other hand, so long as she stayed where she was, there was always the chance that her friends would find her if they had a use for her, and Jaspar contrived to get a message through to Grand'mère, which would set the old lady's mind at rest.

January came, and with it commenced the long spell of frost and snow which will not readily be forgotten by those who lived in the front line, or "rested" in shattered villages and hutted camps immediately behind it.

For eight weeks or more the whole country was frost-bound, and digging became work almost beyond the powers of the strongest, and certainly far beyond that of Adrienne and her badly-nourished compatriots. Coal was scarce, and the Germans did not trouble themselves greatly about such cheap and plentiful material as civilian labour.

The work went on, but the gang dwindled with ever-increasing rapidity, and only Adrienne's sterling constitution and Jaspar's

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ready help brought her through this trying period.

During the bright, frosty days, British aeroplanes constantly passed high overhead, occasionally challenged by concentrations of German machines—for Richthoven's "circus" was on this front—when thrilling battles ensued, watched anxiously by all, but more particularly by Adrienne, who always fancied that Archer was the bold knight-errant in question; and she was depressed for days when, as all too frequently happened, a British plane was outnumbered and shot down.

Sometimes a shower of small bundles would be seen to come fluttering down through the frosty air, being newspapers dropped to encourage the inhabitants, and to contradict the false propaganda put about in German publications, such as the 'Gazette des Ardennes.'

On one great occasion the shower descended actually amongst the working-party, and the excitement was intense, particularly amongst the German guards, who threatened to shoot any person who dared to pick one up. By this means they succeeded in preventing all but two papers from finding their way into the hands of the labourers, one of which was to the credit of Adrienne.

At the time, she was carrying back earth in a basket from the trenches to spread it about in rear, and seeing a packet fall near,

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adroitly managed to empty the earth on to what eventually proved to be a copy of 'Le Matin,' only two days old.

This success was a subject of great congratulations from the other members of the gang—in fact for the moment Adrienne became quite a heroine—and the news gained provided the subject of cheerful conversation for days afterwards—for the newspapers of that period were nothing if not optimistic.

Late in February the long spell of frost broke at last, and the south-west wind brought the first illusory promise of spring. It was the herald of great events to come, and Grand'mère, from her front doorstep, began to hear the roar of distant artillery coming ever nearer, awakening mingled feelings of hope and fear in the minds of the anxious villagers; hope that the hour of deliverance was at last approaching, and fear lest they themselves should be submerged in the advancing tide of battle.

The Germans had timed their retirement with great skill, utilising the frost-bound roads to evacuate their own material, and leaving to the Allies the task of pursuit during the thaw, its difficulties augmented by every means which scientific sabotage could devise.

But, undeterred by all physical obstacles, the British troops pressed on and drove in the stubborn rearguards, regardless of mines and mud; man-handling the guns forward

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when double or even treble teams failed to move them; lying out in the mud and slush on the positions they had reached at nightfall, without the slightest shelter from the elements, until at length, after losing thousands of horses, they had crossed the "devastated area," and were brought up short in front of the outpost line, covering the great German system of defences, nicknamed by the British soldier the "Hindenburg Line."

This line passed some eight miles to the west of Grand'mère's village, and eventually the inhabitants again resigned themselves to a further period of waiting, and to the unwelcome presence of a fresh set of Germans, no less unpleasant than others who had gone before.

It was just about this time that Adrienne's party was relieved by Russian prisoners, and was moved to new quarters, and she bade an almost regretful good-bye to the place where she had worked during the winter, and from which, on a clear day, she had been able to see on the distant horizon the top of the white church tower, peeping over the wooded heights round Monchy-le-Preux, and beyond which she pictured to herself lay the trenches held by *les Anglais*.

How often had she watched the twentieth-century crusaders of the air in the white-winged aeroplanes with the tricolour circles come sailing over these self-same woods, shimmering in the sunlight like moths in the

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headlights of a car, and supremely oblivious to the black and white puffs, which represented the ineffectual efforts of the Boches' "Archies" to stop them!

As the bedraggled party of civilians tramped east along the straight muddy road through Marquion towards Cambrai, she felt that each step was taking her farther from her friends and deeper into bondage.

There appeared everywhere to be a feeling of anxious expectancy in the air, and apparently the move had been the result of a somewhat sudden decision on the part of the Germans, for when they reached their new quarters she found that the camp was not finished. In the meantime, pending its completion, a number of them were to be put into barns in the adjacent village, and Adrienne was one of about fifty who were so accommodated.

Other small parties continued to join the gang, and apparently the intention was to commence another defensive system some distance behind the Hindenburg Line, for which purpose labour was being concentrated from several quarters.

But almost before the work was started, the south-west wind had brought something to Adrienne which gave her a new interest in life, and this is how it happened.

At the point where Adrienne was put on to work, the trace ran through a wood, and her particular duty was to clear the under-

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growth and collect the resulting brush-wood, carrying it away and piling it in neat bundles for future use, whilst the men started to cut a trench laboriously through the roots. She was carrying out her work mechanically, her thoughts far away, when a low and strangely familiar whistle made her edge quietly, but trembling with excitement, towards a thick clump of evergreens, out of which there presently appeared the grimy but grinning face of Jean Bart.

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CHAPTER XII.

SOME UNDERGROUND EXPERIMENTS.

After the abortive attempts to communicate by air with Adrienne, which have already been recorded, Jean spent an uneventful period kicking his heels round Headquarters, and generally becoming thoroughly bored with life. This was nobody's fault in particular, but is merely typical of a soldier's life in war, consisting as it does of periods of almost insupportable strain, alternating with almost equally unbearable periods of drudgery or inactivity.

Jean felt this more than most, partly on account of his restless temperament, but also because he was amongst foreigners, and took no interest in the games which have enabled the Britisher to maintain his national characteristics in all climes and circumstances. If it is true that the sun never sets on the British Empire, it is probably equally safe to surmise that some form of ball is always being propelled therein, and that if the British soldier were allowed to follow a football, he would

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go through hell and hardly notice the temperature. And this is well, for he is called upon to serve in places which appear to be separated only by the proverbial sheet of paper from the infernal regions.

Jean might, of course, have been sent back to "occupied" France by the route which he had followed in his escape, but he had a distinct dislike to the thought of crossing the electrified fence, due chiefly to the memory of the way in which the electrocuted Boche had curled up when he touched it. Apart from this, his characteristics marked him out for more highly specialised "stunts," whilst there were plenty of others available for the ordinary class of risk. The snow which covered the country when the frost came, ruled a landing by aeroplane out of court, as it would prevent the pilot from seeing what he was landing on, and would also greatly assist the enemy in tracking any person who might be landed.

Certain experiments were being carried out, and in the meantime it was decided to explore the possibilities of passing under the enemy's lines.

There were not wanting some of the "oldest inhabitant" class, who graphically described how they had traversed vast distances along subterranean passages, connecting, so they said, their own town or village with others now on the far side of the German lines. True, they had never actually emerged at the

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other end, but usually only because the candle had gone out after proceeding several miles, or for some similar and adequate reason.

Without being optimistic, these statements merited closer investigation, and since the Allies could not afford to neglect any chance, however faint, much time and labour were devoted to the subject, much to the gratification of the informants, who thereby earned a transient notoriety.

In some cases the reports were substantiated in so far that the entrance was located, usually approached by well-worn steps leading down from the cellar of a church, or a monastery, into a well-made passage; but invariably the latter either petered out altogether or merely led to another ecclesiastical establishment.

During certain periods, no doubt, this underground system of communications may have played a leading rôle in preserving the lives of the godly, whilst at other times one might perhaps conjecture that it proved equally convenient as a means of liaison, by which the monotony of monkish existence was materially alleviated. Whether or no this supposition is correct, the conclusion was reluctantly arrived at that, as a means of traversing the enemy's lines, they were "napoo," and the toothless ones retired into obscurity with a thoroughly unearned douceur.

But an efficient Intelligence Service does

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not lightly accept defeat or even discouragement, and investigations were promptly commenced in a different direction. As the result of the battle of Loos, the opposing lines ran through the very centre of the mining area, and though much damage had been done during that battle and subsequent combats, some of the mining installations had had miraculous escapes. So much so was this the case, that pumps were working and coal was being got out little more than a mile behind the British lines, whilst locomotives were hauling it away in broad daylight behind the shelter of the spoil-heaps and workshops.

These gaunt structures certainly presented rather a woebegone appearance, but from the upper storey, where Jean spent much time, a magnificent view could be obtained of the mining area, including such famous points as the Double Crassier, Hill 70—where some of the earlier New Army Divisions gained immortal glory—Lens, Hulloch, and La Bassée, whilst farther back lay Pont-à-Vendin, and in the distance the stately towers of Lille stood up against the horizon, offering to the British soldier as fair a prospect as the Judæan hills must have presented to Moses from the summit of Mount Pisgah. Like Moses, many there were who saw it from afar, but were destined never to live to enter the promised land. As we have said, the whole of this area was honeycombed with shafts and galleries, and a close study of the

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plans of the various systems showed that with very little work it might be possible to get connection with an extensive system on the enemy's side of the lines. There were, however, a great many doubtful questions in the scheme, chief of which was the extent to which the enemy had kept the pumps going, the importance of which will be readily appreciated by every one in England, as it is always a cause of anxiety during the periodical coal strikes.

As an unsolicited testimonial to German thoroughness, it may not be out of place to remark that their destructive efforts at a later period were so efficient, that the mining area will not be clear of water for probably five years.

At this time, however, the reports tended to show that the Germans had not exercised their talents in this particular direction; and, in fact, there was good reason to suppose that they were doing everything possible to preserve such a valuable source of fuel for their own needs.

A point was selected in a high-level gallery where the boring of a barrier only some eighteen feet thick would effect connection with a similar gallery in the adjacent system, and no time was lost in making preparations for tunnelling through, though there was naturally much anxiety as to whether a flood of water would not burst through and sweep the miners away.

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The barrier or partition-wall lay slightly to the other side of the trench line, and the Germans had wrecked the intervening pit-heads, throwing machinery and winding-gear down the shafts, so that it was a matter of extreme difficulty to reach the selected spot; and there was always the danger that the enemy might make it impossible to return, by adding some bombs to the collection of débris. However, British Tunnelling Companies were accustomed to working in conditions where a matter of minutes or even seconds might just make the difference between whether they or the enemy were blown into eternity, and they entered on this particular job *con amore*.

To cut a long story short, the barrier was pierced and no rush of water followed, so the first step was successfully accomplished, the principal *dramatis personæ*, besides the miners, being a French foreman and a young Intelligence Officer; whilst Jean, who fortunately knew the mining area fairly well in pre-war days, was to be the actual person to break ground on the other side.

Meanwhile he divided his time between going down the mine to get accustomed to the conditions, and in studying the country from the ruined workshops and from the map.

A preliminary reconnaissance of the farther system showed that no work was being done in that portion nearest to the British lines, and, moreover, that the deeper galleries were

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quite impassable owing to water and local collapses. The problem was thus narrowed down to emerging by one of three shafts, two of which were somewhat too close to the enemy's lines to be comfortable, whilst the third, and most remote, might prove to be inaccessible; and it was to clear up this point that the Foreman, the Intelligence Officer, and Jean started out one morning.

It took them several hours to reach the first shaft, at the bottom of which there was a certain amount of débris, but not sufficient to prevent them reaching the foot of an iron ladder-way which ran upwards towards the top.

The second was in much the same condition; but on advancing farther towards the third they found that the gallery began to dip, and they were eventually brought to a full stop by water.

They returned, therefore, to the bottom of the second shaft, and sat down to wait for darkness before commencing the ascent of the ladder, listening all the time attentively for any sounds of activity above.

And before very long, from the voices which reached them, it was clear that there were Germans at the top; and they therefore moved back to shaft number one, which was now the last hope, and being the nearest to the trench line, the most unfavourably situated of the three.

In fact, the foreman was for abandoning

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the enterprise altogether; but the Intelligence Officer, fired with the enthusiasm of youth, persuaded him to stay, as without him they could not have found their way back again.

It was nearly midnight when the young officer, closely followed by Jean, commenced the tiring ascent, and they were within some twenty feet of the surface when the leader suddenly found his hand encounter the side of the shaft instead of the next rung in the ladder. He reached up as high as he could, but still no ladder, for the simple reason that the Germans had adopted the obvious expedient of removing the top twenty feet and so effectively preventing its use by the enemy. However, he was unaware of this, and commenced to flash his torch upwards along the sides of the shaft to see if there was any means of making farther progress. And this nearly put an abrupt termination to two promising careers, for the torch illuminated the structure over the pit-head, which immediately caught the eye of the German sentry at the top. He shouted to the picket, and as the officer and Jean commenced to retire rapidly, several Germans came to the edge, and one flashed a torch downwards, the light of which fortunately did not quite reach our friends. One of the men—probably the picket commander — shouted out something, and shortly after a heavy object whizzed past them, and striking the sides of the shaft at

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intervals, finally burst some seconds later far below them with what sounded like a terrific explosion.

The two stopped and flattened themselves against the ladder, whilst more stick grenades followed. This fusilade lasted for some minutes, and then, either because they were satisfied that any one at the bottom must have been annihilated, or because their ammunition was exhausted, the bombardment ceased; and after an interval, Jean and the officer ventured to continue the descent, anxiously wondering whether anything beyond a few mangled remains would be left of the foreman, whom they had left at the bottom.

The latter, indeed, though still conscious, was apparently severely wounded. His injuries would have been worse, had he not, after the first bomb, managed to crawl behind some wreckage which had protected him from the subsequent explosions; and the two lost no time in getting him to a safer place, in case a fresh shower of grenades should be precipitated upon them. Having rendered first aid to the best of their ability, they anxiously discussed what was the best course to take, and came to the conclusion that the only thing to do was to stay where they were and wait for the search party, which would probably be sent out when they failed to return; and eventually they were rescued some twenty-four hours later.

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But this experience showed that the Germans were fully alive to the possibility of using the mines as a means of communication; and it was decided—to the intense satisfaction of Jean and the secret disappointment of the young Intelligence Officer, who had had visions of winning great renown—that the chapter of mining enterprises should be definitely closed, and Jean was sent to England, where the experiments already referred to were nearing completion.

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CHAPTER XIII.

ADRIFT.

JEAN found his new occupation a decidedly chilly one during the winter days, though it had distinct advantages from that point of view over aeroplaning, and he soon began to take a keen interest in what he had hitherto regarded much in the same light as a cricketer looks upon croquet. If you could manage to keep your feet warm, it was quite delightful sailing peacefully along, without a perfect hurricane from a propeller trying to take the hair off your head. Then, when you arrived, there was the excitement of finding out *where* you had arrived, and the easiest way of getting back again to the place you had started from. The instructor, too, was a delightful fellow, like most people who have followed the sea, and a real enthusiast to boot; and Jean could not help admiring his devil-may-care, sink-or-swim outlook on life, and the light-hearted spirit in which he bumped into things which happened to get in the way, though the Frenchman occasion-

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ally had some anxious moments before the roars of laughter of his mentor reassured him that they were still alive.

However, generally speaking, the companionship did a great deal to restore his morale, and to remove the unpleasant impression left on his mind by experiences such as the electrified fence and the coal-mine. When they were not on tour, he worked very hard learning the ins and outs of certain mechanical contrivances, which were by no means easy to master.

It was not until the beginning of March that the party had completed its preparations and was ready for the fray, when the whole outfit was transported to a special camp some fifteen miles behind the British lines, where it was duly equipped with motor transport by the local William Whiteley, otherwise known as "Q."

The weather remained unfavourable for some time, but eventually the south-westerly wind, for which they had been waiting, made an attempt possible, and the little camp became a scene of great activity.

In the first place, instruments were set up in position some distance apart, and small balloons of the type which were frequently found behind the British lines, carrying little electric lights and dry batteries, were filled and sent aloft, carefully followed by the observers at the instruments so long as they were in sight. The object of all this was,

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of course, precisely that for which the enemy adopted similar measures—viz., to ascertain the strength and direction of the wind—and it was followed by careful plotting on a map. As a result, it was calculated that the "kick off" should take place at a spot fifteen miles to the south of the camp, and shortly afterwards a party, including Jean, left in three motor-lorries for the rendezvous.

Arrived there, the instruments were again set up, and the small balloons were despatched as before, whilst the leading lorry disgorged an inchoate mass, which proved to be an empty spherical balloon, and the second a number of long hydrogen cylinders for inflating the same. As darkness fell, acetylene flares were lighted, which showed up the great globe gradually swelling until it lifted the small basket-work car clear of the ground, and had to be held down by the fatigue party on the guys. By 10.30 P.M., the time fixed for the start, all was ready, and the final tests showed that the direction of the wind had remained steady, though its strength had somewhat increased.

This, however, was immaterial, as it only meant a slight shortening of the time of flight in order to achieve the same object. Certainly the night was not ideal, as the clouds were somewhat low, obscuring a quarter moon; but this had its advantages, as it precluded any possibility of being observed when crossing the trench lines.

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Jean received some final instructions from a Staff Officer, and carefully adjusted a luminous chronometer strapped across his forearm. Then he wrapped something round his waist, placed a small but heavy square box and some sandbags in the car, tested certain strings, and finally got in himself.

The Staff Officer and then his old instructor shook Jean warmly by the hand, bidding him *bon voyage;* the men on the guys let go, and the great balloon shot up silently into the night, vanishing like a wraith in the direction of the enemy's lines, followed by a spontaneous and wholly unauthorised cheer from the fatigue party.

Jean, crouching in the car, soon found that he could see nothing on the ground beyond the confused lights of the camps, the more symmetrically arranged flares on the aerodromes to guide any wandering 'planes, and an occasional car, crawling like a glow-worm along some highroad. Gradually these died away as he got nearer to the front, and to his astonishment he failed to observe the opposing lines, which on previous occasions had been clearly marked by a veritable pyrotechnic display of artillery and Very lights. As a matter of fact, this part of the front was in motion, owing to the German retirement towards the Hindenburg Line, and there would have been little to see except the flashes of the few guns, which bickered at rare intervals throughout the night.

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He looked at his watch, and found that though more than an hour had elapsed, he had still a long time to go before he descended. There was absolutely nothing to be seen above or below him, and he had no idea of his height; but when he suddenly drifted into a cold damp fog, he knew he was in the clouds, and that it would be well to come down out of them, or he might get into a wrong air-current. He therefore let out some gas, possibly too much, or else the wet fog weighted down the balloon, for before he knew where he was, he found himself close to the ground and almost into a wood. Over went some sandbags, and he cleared the trees comfortably; but he had to sacrifice nearly all his ballast to get up again to what he considered a reasonable height above a village, where lights were still visible, showing that it was in German occupation, and probably well behind the lines. As he went over the village, it seemed to him that he was travelling at a considerably faster rate than he had previously imagined, but this might, of course, be an optical delusion, owing to his being so close to the ground. In any case it was not going to be an easy matter to get out of the balloon, even if he pulled the ripping panel; and he certainly did not want to do that, for the deflated balloon would be the most damning evidence of his whereabouts next morning. During the next half-hour, as he sat shivering in the car, the more he thought about it the

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less he liked it, and he could only hope that he would have the luck to strike an open space with no trees. He comforted himself with the reflection that there was always more cultivation than woods; but it was a positive relief when his watch showed him that the time had come for the final act, and he pulled the string to let out gas, at the same time peering anxiously down into the darkness. For a time he could see nothing, but gradually a dark mass took shape below him—was it earth or trees? Another second or two and doubt had vanished—it was trees! He jettisoned his last sandbag and just scraped over them. Oh, joy! a little distance beyond them was a perfectly level expanse, which looked admirably suited for landing. He seized the square box and prepared to jump, the balloon dropping all the time. Now he was only a few feet above it,—horrors! it was water! There was nothing for it, and the all-important box hit the surface with a mighty splash, as the balloon, relieved of some 30 lb. weight, shot up aloft.

It was a disaster from every point of view at the time, but even this particular cloud has a silver lining, for the box probably lies buried to this day in the mud beneath the turgid waters of the Scheldt, and consequently it is unnecessary to acquaint the reader with a secret which, unlike most war secrets, is not yet public property, and may therefore be of some use in the future.

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As the water disappeared from view with the rapid rise of the balloon, Jean began furiously to think what his next step was to be. A decision was not difficult, since, assuming that the Staff Officer's calculations had been approximately correct, every minute was taking him farther away from the point which he had started out to reach.

There had evidently been a mistake of some kind, or else he had nearly dropped into entirely fresh inundations, because he could not remember anything of a big sheet of water near the intended landing-place. Then he remembered the speed at which he had passed over the village, and decided that in all probability he had already overshot the mark, so without further delay he proceeded to come down. Relieved of the precious box, the task of getting out of the car was considerably simplified, and this time he had better luck, for when he jumped he landed in a ploughed field. History does not relate what happened to the balloon after Jean saw it disappear into the darkness, though this very question was discussed with some merriment by the Staff Officer and the Mariner, the former being of opinion that it would come down near the German training camp at Beverloo and frighten the recruits, whilst the latter favoured the idea of its dropping behind the mine-fields in the Bight, and creating alarm and despondency amongst the High Seas Fleet sheltering therein.

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No doubt both were wrong, but it is fairly certain that it created a nine days' wonder somewhere.

Later on, when the intensive propaganda campaign started, derelict balloons must have become as common as blackberries, and reports about them a positive nuisance to the German Intelligence Service.

It must be explained that Jean's instructions were to get in touch with friends in Cambrai, with a view to organising a system of watching the road and rail communications centring in that town, and by which it might be expected that German reinforcements would arrive as soon as Allenby's great attack started; and such movements were to be duly reported by means of the square box. Without the latter the whole scheme fell to the ground, and Jean lost no time in disposing of the remainder of the apparatus, which he still carried on his person, feeling all the time supremely foolish to have undertaken such risks for absolutely no result, his only remaining means of communication being one miserable pigeon by which he was to announce his arrival. That must wait till morning, and in the meantime he made his way back up wind, on the chance of striking some familiar landmark, until he was brought up short by water. Edging round it, he proceeded until he found himself in long grass, apparently on a narrow spit of land with water in every direction, so far as he could see. It seemed

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useless to wander about any more in the darkness, and he decided to lie up where he was, since it appeared to be the kind of spot which no one but a lunatic would be likely to visit. In the distance he could hear a faint rumble of artillery, and judged that he was a considerable distance behind the lines. Then he went to sleep.

It was daylight when he woke, chilled to the bone, and he now saw that he was on the northern edge of a series of marshes and lakes, which could only be the valley of either the Sensée or the Scheldt, and therefore a considerable distance beyond Cambrai, so that his surmise as to the increased speed at which the balloon had been travelling had been correct.

There did not seem to be much point in going to Cambrai in the circumstances; in fact, he felt at a thoroughly loose end, and like most people in similar circumstances, conceived a longing to see once more his old home and the scene of his past exploits, with its familiar faces, more particularly Adrienne, who would be able to tell him all the news. Between them they might be able to fix up something which would be useful to the Allies, if not exactly what he had been sent to do.

After a careful look round he wrote a message informing "le Commandant" in guarded terms of what had happened and what he intended to do, and sent off the

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bird, which, as a matter of fact, reached its destination.

Shortly after he had done this, a little girl appeared in sight, driving some cattle down to feed in the grass by the marshes. Having watched her for some time, Jean crawled through the grass, and taking cover behind a cow, accosted her. The maiden was at first somewhat taken aback, but on his explaining that he was a prisoner of war who had escaped from *les Boches*, she at once assumed the attitude of the "little mother," promising solemnly to keep his secret, and intensely proud at being able to do something to spite the hated Hun and help a fellow-countryman in distress.

From her he learnt that Cambrai was about eight miles to the south-west, that she herself lived near Bouchain, and she explained how he could get across the marshes and the Scheldt, avoiding the main bridges, which were usually guarded. Jean was now sufficiently oriented, so he bade good-bye to the little maiden, and started to work his way cautiously in the direction she had indicated.

All went well, and it was just getting dark when he reached the little white cottage on the outskirts of a hamlet, which she had accurately described, and where her married sister lived, whose husband was in the French Army. Jean opened the door and walked straight in, to the consternation of a young woman who was attending to a child of some

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three summers, apparently the only other occupant of the cottage.

The child set up a yell, but was quickly quieted by an energetic "*Tais-toi, Ferdinand!*" from his mother. Jean explained that he had been directed to her by Marguerite, and once her fears were set at rest, she was as anxious as her little sister to help him.

She explained that there were Germans in the village, mostly engaged on water transport work on the Scheldt, by which means very large quantities of stores were brought up to the German Army. Her boat had been commandeered, unfortunately; but these Germans were a poor lot, and she thought they could get hold of one without any great difficulty, and she would bring it back again, so that there should be no trace of any one having used it during the night.

Whilst they were discussing this point, steps were heard outside, and she motioned Jean to get under the bed destined apparently for Ferdinand, and Jean was barely in concealment before an elderly German entered with a polite "*Bon soir, Madame.*" His errand apparently was merely to acquire eggs, and he made himself comfortable in a chair, preparatory to discussing the question at some length. The young woman replied that she had not got any, and went on with her preparations to put the boy to bed, whispering fiercely to that hero to keep his

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mouth shut, and in a perfect agony lest he should make some naïve remark about their visitor, who had the strange fancy to lie under his bed in preference to sitting in a chair.

Then, as the German showed no signs of leaving, she at last left Ferdinand and fetched two eggs from the other room, which she presented to the German, asking him at the same time to come outside, so that the child could get to sleep.

After some desultory conversation at the front door the German eventually left, with the impression that the young woman was an extremely pleasant person, who parted with eggs on unusually favourable terms, and that he had made a sufficiently favourable impression to justify a repetition of his visit.

Jean then emerged, and they continued the discussion of their plans for the night. He offered to swim across, but she would not hear of it. Then he suggested that he should take the boat across and just abandon it on the other side. It was altogether too much to ask her to leave the child alone in the cottage at night, with no certainty of getting back to it; but she was quite clear that when Ferdinand grew older he would be proud to have played his small part in helping a prisoner, and as it was obviously better that the boat should be replaced, Jean rather reluctantly eventually agreed to her plan.

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Late that night the two stole down to the water's edge. The wind had died away and a heavy mist hung in the valley over the river, through which they could see several big barges tied up to the tow-path. If there were any Germans aboard they appeared to be asleep, for there was no sign of life, and, after watching for some time, Jean decided to cut out the only small boat visible, which was tied to the far side of the stern of one of the barges.

Taking off his boots he stole up the gangway, listening attentively. From below came the sounds of heavy breathing, but still nothing stirred, and he crept along to the stern and peered down into the boat to see if there was any means of propelling it. It was empty, and he surmised that the oars must be somewhere on board the barge, probably down below. A careful search on the deck, however, disclosed a punt-pole, which would do equally well as there was practically no current, and Jean drove this into the mud between the stern of the barge and the bank.

Then he cast off the boat and brought it to the bank, tying it to the pole, after which he crept down the gangway again, and the two got into the boat and pushed quietly out into the stream. As they punted across they expected every moment to be challenged; but nothing happened, and Jean was soon making his way towards the high-road to Solesmes. Before they parted, he

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had begged his fair confederate not to attempt the difficult and dangerous task of restoring the boat and pole to their former position —advice which she entirely disregarded, and, strange to relate, with no untoward consequences, for, as she had said, these particular Germans were a poor lot.

This brave woman does not appear again in this narrative, but Ferdinand must by now be a big boy of six or seven; and though his share in the business was only that of sleeping partner, he did it well, and it is permissible to hope that his war record is taken into consideration, when the village *gamins* elect the captain of the pirate crew, which annually hoists the skull and crossbones at the masthead of a plank raft on the Scheldt during the summer holidays.

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CHAPTER XIV.

A REUNION.

JEAN had had a good meal, and the young woman had provided him with ample *provision de voyage*, so that as he made his way across country, keeping parallel to the road, he felt in excellent spirits, and promised himself that when he found Adrienne they would do something big between them, though he did not quite know what. As he gradually left the valley of the Scheldt and got up on to the higher ground, all the time carefully avoiding the villages, the air grew fresher and clearer, and when, at about 3 A.M., he reached the main Cambrai–Le-Cateau road, the stars were shining clear in the sky, and he trod well-known ground with all the confidence of a ghillie returning to his native moor. The country, which was wide, open, rolling fields, with no hedges or cover of any kind outside the vicinity of the villages, though excellent for night marching, was not the place to be caught in in daylight, and he decided to push on to some excellent covers

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which he knew of, about five or six miles farther south, and from which another night's journey would enable him to reach his own village. He had calculated that he could get to the woods comfortably before daylight, provided all went well, but unfortunately he ran into a column on the march, and lost nearly an hour whilst waiting for it to clear his front.

Consequently, when he reached the vicinity of the wood for which he was making, he was distinctly pushed for time, as the stars were already paling in the first early light of dawn. There was a village about half a mile from the wood, so in case any of the villagers should be early astir, he made a detour to enter it on the far side. Had he not been in such a hurry he might have noticed indications of impending work, such as pegs and tracing-tape, and guessed that this particular wood was not a very safe place for a fugitive.

Quite unconscious of this fact, he selected a spot well in the middle of the wood amongst rhododendron bushes, which seemed to afford ample cover, and settled himself down for the day.

Before he had been there very long, however, he was roused by the sound of a number of people advancing apparently along a path which ran close to his lair. In a moment he was all attention, but was somewhat relieved to hear as they approached that they were talking French.

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He crawled to the edge of the bushes, whence he could get a partial view of the procession, and saw a large party of all ages, men and women, carrying picks, shovels, hatchets, &c., behind them a dozen German soldiers fully armed, and last of all an officer, who was apparently in charge of the whole party.

Jean could not see the faces of the civilians, as they were proceeding in more or less of a mob, but suddenly his heart gave a jump as his eyes lighted on the back view of a trim figure which seemed familiar. She had passed before he could see her face, but there is usually something distinctive about a person's walk and the carriage of the head, and Jean felt almost certain that it was Adrienne.

What on earth was she doing here, so far from home, and how was he to get into touch with her ?

He watched the last soldier disappear, and then, leaving his concealment, followed the party by a series of rapid dashes from cover to cover. His last advance nearly landed him in trouble, for the party had been halted and was being distributed for work, the majority apparently extended along the edge of the wood by which he had entered. He could see very little and had to go by the sounds, but at least one German—presumably a works overseer—was shouting out orders and instructions in villainous French, and some of the armed soldiers would probably

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be placed outside the wood to prevent any straying from the working party. His next move was not clear, but he thought that when work was in full swing he might have a better chance of finding Adrienne, if indeed it was she.

Then the sounds of chopping seemed to be coming in his direction, and he began to wonder whether it would not be safer to withdraw, but decided to take the chance that it might be some one who could give him information, and he stayed where he was.

The worker was humming a tune, and though Jean was the class of person who is only quite certain that the band is playing "God Save the King" when the audience stands up, this particular noise seemed somehow to be familiar to him, though he had not the vaguest idea what the tune was.

Then the person moved away, and Jean worked his way forward to the very edge of his cover, hoping that whoever it was would return. To his delight she did so, and in answer to a low whistle, Adrienne presently joined him, her eyes shining with delight, but otherwise, so it seemed to him, only a shadow of her former self.

"How on earth did you get here?" she whispered; and she punctuated the recital of his midnight voyage with exclamations of wonder, and a deep sigh of regret when he came to the tragedy of the square box.

With a slightly heightened colour she asked

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him how "Monsieur Archaire" was, and her face fell when Jean had to confess that he had not the faintest idea, for he had not seen that young officer since the abortive flight which they had made together to try and reach the rendezvous with Adrienne.

She did not pursue the subject further, nor was she at all communicative about her own experiences, as she insisted, with her usual common-sense, that the important thing at the moment was to make some plan for the future, since they could not stay indefinitely in the bushes, where they were then concealed.

Jean proposed that he should go on down to see Grand'mère, and there work out a plan for getting her away; but Adrienne did not think that this would help matters much, and made the following alternative suggestion.

They had only been one day in their present place, and the new guard, which had taken over the party on its arrival, did not know its members personally by sight, and merely counted heads to see if all were present.

Supposing Jean was to change places with Jaspar: would they not then be able to mature plans for the future at leisure? There would be no great difficulty in making their escape whenever they wanted to, but it was no use doing so unless they had a clear idea of what they intended to do afterwards. That could not be decided in five minutes, and, in the meantime, Jaspar could go down

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to the village and find out how things were going there, and whether there were any of their friends still left at large who would be of any use to the cause. There was, of course, the chance that some member of the labour gang might observe the substitution and denounce Jean to the Germans; but, fortunately, they were split up in different billets, and she thought her own party in the barn were all reliable.

If Jean agreed, she would go and warn Jaspar at once, and make a plan for the two to change places; meantime he should stay where he was.

It was not very easy getting to Jaspar, as he was working at a trench a little way off her beat; but she gradually edged down in his direction, and had actually given him his instructions, before the overseer, who fancied himself as a wit, observed their conversation. "What are you doing down there, you brazen-faced slut?" he roared. "Can't you keep away from the men, even during the daytime?"

Adrienne, scarlet in the face, withdrew in as dignified a manner as the circumstances permitted, followed by the sympathetic glances of the workers who had heard the insult; but though boiling with indignation, they did not, of course, dare to show their feelings.

However, Jaspar was now fully apprised of the situation, and would take the first opportunity of slipping away either during

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the day or on their homeward journey. The roll was usually called before they marched off, and again when they got into camp, and it was for Adrienne to let Jean know, according to circumstances, when to join the gang, so that the number should be correct on both occasions.

Obviously the later the change could be postponed the better, and actually Jaspar was still in his place when the gang was collecting tools prior to assembling for the first roll-call. It was getting dusk, and the officer was standing waiting for the party to collect, whilst the overseer, who had insulted Adrienne, was cursing the workmen and telling them to be quick.

Adrienne, with incredible boldness, went up to the officer and said, "Monsieur le Hauptmann, is it your wish that a *sous-officier* should insult a poor French girl for no reason?"

The remainder of the party gasped with astonishment at such unheard-of temerity, and waited, expecting the skies to fall; but instead, the German mildly asked her who it was that had insulted her, and then shouted to the offender to come at once.

By this time all eyes were watching the unusual drama, and as the overseer left to go to the officer, Jaspar seized the opportunity to slip away, and was soon changing clothes with Jean.

Meanwhile Adrienne, with astonishing cool-

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ness, was confronting the overseer, who was torn between rage at this unexpected attack and fear of offending his officer—for he could only account for the latter's attitude on the assumption that he took more than a friendly interest in the pretty girl, according to the custom of German officers in back areas. On any other supposition it was inconceivable that she should have had the audacity to accuse him in the way she had done. He therefore first attempted to deny that he had said anything at which to take offence, but Adrienne appealed to others of the party to confirm her statement, and taking courage in numbers and the gathering gloom, they unanimously supported her. The overseer then fell back on the excuse that she had left her duty and was wasting her own time and that of the men working on the trench. The argument waxed hot, and finally the officer cut short the discussion by shouting to the party to fall in—but not before Adrienne had observed the arrival of Jean in the background.

When the roll was called, the latter boldly answered to the name Degoutte, and the party marched off back to the village, Adrienne wondering how long it would be before the officer commenced to make advances or the overseer contrived to get his own back. She determined to anticipate either event by severing her connection with the gang at an early date.

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Jaspar was to come back as soon as possible and to get into the barn some time during the day, when the gang was away at work, since it was possible that all the cover in the wood might have been removed by that time.

In the interval, Adrienne and Jean were making plans for the future, and in this they were assisted by a girl of good family, named Lucille de ——. She had been one of a band of patriots in Lille, engaged for more than a year in hiding and feeding several hundred French Territorials, who had concealed themselves when Lille surrendered after a short bombardment in 1914, and many of whom had subsequently escaped to Holland and so rejoined the French Army. Some of the leaders in this patriotic organisation had been arrested and shot, shortly before Lucille was deported; but there still remained others, notably a distinguished ecclesiastic, of whom more anon.

Lucille's mother was in Paris, but an invalid sister was still living in the family house, and she suggested that they might be able to do some good work there, and in any case would probably be safer in a large town like Lille than almost anywhere else in the occupied territory, once they could get there, though this might not be easy.

Our two friends thought there might be a good deal in the idea, but before coming to a final decision in the matter, preferred to

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wait until Jaspar got back, when they would be in a better position to judge whether there was anything to be done nearer their own home; for the French, and particularly the agricultural classes, are highly conservative in such matters.

The question of covering their tracks was carefully debated. In Jean's case there was no difficulty, since Jaspar would naturally step into his place again; but how to conceal the fact of Adrienne's departure was a problem which entirely baffled them.

They had a bad fright, too, when, on the third morning after Jaspar's departure, they heard that their camp was ready and that they would all be going into it on the following day. Jaspar was due to return, but if they did not find him in the barn when they got back from work that evening, their whole plan would have to be recast.

Fortunately the necessity for this did not arise, as he was up to time, and was hiding under some straw in a corner when they got back from work that evening.

After the guards had settled down, the three discussed their plans far into the night. Jaspar brought news that the inhabitants were being evacuated to the rear from villages only a little nearer the front than their own, and Grand'mère expected to follow soon; that the whole place was swarming with troops, and that their old haunts were much too near the front to give them a chance of

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working for the Allies with any possibility of success, and he begged them not to think of it. Reluctantly they came to the conclusion that he was right, and this threw them back finally on to Lucille's plan.

Next morning, when the gang filed out for work and collected in the centre of the village preparatory to marching off, Jean and Adrienne remained hidden under the straw in a large farm wain behind the barn, into which they had crept during the night, and which, so they had observed, had not been touched for several days. Their plan was to get away during the day, when everybody with the exception of the bedridden was out working in the fields, and they thought the waggon was less likely to be searched than the barn when Adrienne was missed.

In the meantime, the roll was being called under the superintendence of a new officer, a Lieutenant. Jaspar, who had observed this immediately he reached the assembly place, and who, in response to his question as to what had happened to "*Le Hauptmann*," had received the laconic reply, "*Parti*," now had a brain-wave.

When Adrienne's name was called, there was, of course, a dead silence. The overseer looked up and shouted her name again, and receiving no reply, asked if any one knew where she was.

Then a voice came from the rear rank, "*Demandez au Hauptmann*," which provoked

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a titter all down the line, joined in even by the German guard, for this was a jest which appealed equally to both nationalities. The overseer, scowling, said something in German to the Lieutenant to the effect that he had always suspected something fishy in that quarter, and that the "*Hauptmann*" had probably taken her away with him to Valenciennes. He would have liked to add, "more fool he," but was not sure how the Lieutenant would take it, so refrained.

And this theory was apparently accepted, at any rate for the time, as a satisfactory explanation for her disappearance. Moreover, it was obviously a matter into which a junior officer would be unwise to inquire further, though, of course, neither Jean nor Adrienne, listening anxiously in the waggon, were aware of the manner in which a kind fate had befriended them.

As a matter of fact, they soon had sufficient anxieties of their own to prevent them thinking of anything else, for people came into the yard, and after some discussion in French, proceeded to hook in horses, and, without its contents being examined, the waggon eventually rumbled out into the road. This was an unexpected development, which might or might not turn out to their advantage.

Their presence must soon be discovered, and the question was whether the owner of the waggon would have the pluck to stand by them, or would denounce them to the

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Germans. The two could bring to their aid three powerful inducements—viz., patriotism, money, and, in the last resort, Jean's pistol —but it would be very unfortunate if they had to use the last alternative. It was soon to be settled, for, as the waggon left the village, a youth who had been walking beside the horses clambered up over the back, and nearly trod on Jean's face in making his way to join an elderly woman who was sitting at the front.

"Hist!" said Jean, as the lad was just about to shout out something; "do you want to earn fifty francs?"

The woman looked round, and Jean signed to her to go straight on without looking round, at the same time unostentatiously letting her see the muzzle of the pistol which he had in his hand. Petrified with fear, she obeyed, whilst Jean entered into negotiations with the lad; but as he soon found that the woman was the senior partner in the firm, he told the lad to change places with her. She appeared to be one of the large and growing class of French peasants who were thoroughly cowed and ready to take the line of least resistance. Had our friends asked her to smuggle them out of the village, she would undoubtedly have refused; but Jean pointed out that she had actually done so, and the Germans would never believe that she had not been an accessory before the fact. Between them they finally convinced her that

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her safest plan would be to finish the job and say nothing about it, and the promise of one hundred francs removed any last doubts on the point.

She was taking the straw out to sell it to a neighbouring farmer who lived some three miles away. What sort of a man was he? "Oh, *très patriote*"; he had two sons in the French Army, one of whom had been *décoré*.

Were there any Germans about his farm? She did not think so, as it was rather too much off the main road for the rank and file, and not a good enough house to attract an officer.

She was anxious to get rid of the fugitives as soon as possible; but as the country was open and devoid of cover, they insisted that they would go to the farm and nowhere else, and seeing that she was in the position of a dog with a flea on its back which declines to quit, she had to agree. Thus they eventually left the main road, and proceeded by a track to the farm in question, stopping in a big courtyard surrounded by farm buildings, where the usual filthy pond was surrounded by an accumulation of manure which gave rich promise for the future.

The farmer was not visible at the moment, so Jean and Adrienne betook themselves to the upper storey of a barn, whence they could obtain a good view of the courtyard, having handed over the one hundred francs to the old woman, with the knowledge that,

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once she had got rid of her uninvited guests, she was not in the least likely to make trouble for herself by letting any one know about her share in their escape, or allowing the lad to do so.

The farmer, a tired, elderly man, eventually made his appearance, and the straw was unloaded into the lower half of the barn which our friends were occupying; but it was only after the waggon had left that they attracted his attention. He immediately came up the ladder, and to cut a long story short, expressed his willingness to help them, though he was evidently very nervous as to the consequences, and not at all confident as to his ability to do so; for his only carriage horse had been commandeered, and he had no permission to go more than a few miles from his farm, being somewhat suspect owing to his sons being in the French Army and his well-known patriotism.

In any case, it was between sixty and seventy miles to Lille, and how could Mademoiselle, who looked tired and ill, possibly cover the distance in less than three or four days, or rather nights? and then her boots did not look as if they would stand much more walking.

These remarks evidently put an idea in Jean's head, for he asked whether any motors or lorries ever used the main road near the farm. On receiving a reply in the affirmative, with some details, he slapped his chest, and

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asked: "Why should these cursed Boche swine flaunt about the roads in *autos*, when French ladies have to trudge along in the mud, and in their own country too? It's quite time this was changed," said he, "and it is I, Jean Bart, who will set the example. How do I propose to do it?" and he was quite unconscious of plagiarism when he added, "*Qui vivra, verra*," or in the language of statecraft, "Wait and see!"

Though he asked a good many questions, they could get nothing more out of him, beyond the fact that he and Adrienne would start at 9 P.M., and probably not return that night. They would require food for two days, a couple of lanterns, and a suit belonging to one of the farmer's absent sons for Adrienne, which that worthy went away to collect, the clothes being asked for with the idea that Adrienne's description might already have been circulated by the Germans.

When he had departed Jean unfolded his scheme, and got Adrienne, who, from longer experience, was the more proficient linguist, to give him some simple lessons, and eventually she pronounced his accent as being sufficiently correct for the purpose. She also made two masks from the skirt of her dress, and when the clothes arrived, and the change had been completed behind some bundles of hay, she smilingly surveyed herself, regretting that "Monsieur Archaire" was not there to see how nice she looked in them. At the

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appointed time they left, and made their way to a point on the road where it turned a corner.

Adrienne took up her position about 200 yards away on the side from which the motors generally came, and Jean went just round the corner, where he could see Adrienne across the intervening field, both taking cover in a shallow ditch behind a bank which bordered the road. They lighted their lamps and put them in the ditch, carefully concealing the light.

The car for which they were waiting was an open one, and the arrangement was that Adrienne, by means of her lamp, would signal to Jean the number of people in it, so far as she could see as it passed her, and he would then hold it up, if there were not more than two occupants.

A motor convoy first rumbled past from Jean's direction, and it was not till about 11 P.M. that Adrienne heard a single motor coming towards her, which, from the fact that it had pneumatic tyres, she judged might be the right one. The car was moving comparatively slowly, for the night was dark and stormy, and wet snow was falling intermittently. As it passed, she put her head over the bank, and saw that there was one, or possibly two men in front—she could not clearly distinguish which—but undoubtedly the back seats were empty. So as to be on the safe side, she showed her light twice, on

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which Jean jumped up and placed his lantern in the middle of the road, himself taking cover behind a tree some ten yards short of it.

The driver, coming round the corner, suddenly saw the lantern, put his brakes on, and with true German obedience to authority, stopped dead in reply to a loud "*Halt!*" not unnaturally thinking it was an Examining Post of some kind.

Before they had realised their mistake—for there were two men in the car—a torch flashed on them from behind, and they were looking down the muzzle of a pistol held by a masked man, which decided them to obey the order, "Hands up," delivered in Jean's best German.

When Adrienne, also wearing a mask, came up, she removed the carbine from between the knees of the man beside the driver, and got into the back seat, pressing the muzzle into the small of his back, whilst Jean, pistol in hand, superintended the restarting of the motor by the other man.

They were then told to take off their long coats, and when our friends were dressed in these, surmounted by trench helmets which they found in the car, the whole turn-out presented a sufficiently martial appearance to satisfy any cursory examination. One of the Germans could speak French sufficiently well to understand that they were to drive through Solesmes for Valenciennes, and that if the car failed to get past any Examining Posts

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en route, the first casualties would not be French but German.

One of the men, not the driver, was discarded minus his boots some fifteen miles farther on in a lonely part of the road, miles from anywhere. Even so, he perhaps was fortunate, for in Jean's opinion there was only one good kind of Boche—viz., a dead Boche—and it needed quite a display of firmness on Adrienne's part to dissuade him from the most obvious method of destroying any evidence against them. Partly, perhaps, owing to the inclemency of the weather, they had no difficulty of any description until entering Valenciennes, where they were stopped by a picket, who emerged shivering into the wet snow, which was now falling heavily on them as on Allenby's cavalry thirty miles away to the west.

The driver's intelligence, however, was distinctly sharpened by the knowledge that, under the rug, a pistol was pointing at the small of his back; and not being in any way a hero, he satisfied the picket commander, whose chief preoccupation was to get back to his warm room, that the occupants were two sleepy officers, straight from the trenches, going to Brussels to report on urgent business; and the car was soon heading north again.

The last tin of petrol was put into the tank in the middle of the Forêt de Raines, and the driver was shortly after abandoned,

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also minus his boots, and after he had given full information as to the best road for Ath, which, needless to say, was not the direction in which they intended to travel. The car itself was driven by Jean a short way farther in that direction and left in a ditch. The two then doubled back on their tracks, and by daylight were with friends less than ten miles from Lille, which they entered safely on the following afternoon, thanks to the assistance of one of the patriots, whose address had been given by Lucille.

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CHAPTER XV.

IN LILLE.

JEAN and Adrienne were now safely ensconced at Lille in the house of Lucille's sister, a young invalid French lady named Valèrie de ——. The house, a fine old mansion, far surpassed anything which Adrienne had ever previously inhabited; but it was rather dreary, as the only occupant, besides the invalid, was an elderly serving-maid, named Léonie, who managed to get through work which in England would have occupied two or three persons. As has already been stated, Valèrie's mother was on the other side of the lines, whilst her two brothers were with the French army, one as an officer, the other as a priest, and her only sister had been conscripted into a labour gang, where we have already made her passing acquaintance.

Valèrie herself was a sweet-faced girl of about Adrienne's age and of somewhat similar height and colouring, but she suffered from a weak heart, and was incapable of any exertion, a condition which the vicissitudes of

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life in Lille had accentuated to an alarming degree. She was a devout Catholic, and her family were intimate with local clerical circles, and in particular with a high dignitary of the Church, whom we will call *le Curé*.

The latter, from the earliest days of the War, had stuck to his post, and had played a noble part amongst the inhabitants of Lille. It was he who bearded the German authorities to demand justice for his flock, when the behaviour of the invaders passed the bounds of endurance. It was he again who helped to organise emergency hospitals, where French and British wounded were tended by the ladies of the city, at a period when the Germans had neither the time nor possibly the inclination to accept any burden which did not directly lead to an early and successful termination of the war.

French ladies, as a rule, are entirely ignorant of the art of nursing, but Valèrie and her sister had worked devotedly in one of these hospitals to the best of their ability until the former's health had completely broken down, after which the most she could do was to hide fugitives, as in the present instance.

Lille itself was swarming with German soldiers, who regarded the town much in the same light as the British looked on Amiens, a centre of life and gaiety, where for a few hours the horrors of war could be forgotten. But over the unfortunate inhabitants rested an iron hand; and though the

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band of patriots, which included "le Curé," still continued their good work, the restrictions on movement, frequent perquisitions and arrests, and, worst of all, the tell-tale list of inmates which had to be posted on the door of every house, made it increasingly difficult.

Still, the few remaining survivors of the French garrison were hidden and fed; at night the paper-balloons, carrying news of the enemy's dispositions, were despatched on favouring winds to the Allies, occasionally to reach their destination; papers dropped by British aeroplanes were circulated; and when these ceased to come "le Curé" was still undefeated, and contrived to receive and circulate the Poldhu and Eifel wireless communiqués, thereby greatly heartening the faithful, and giving the lie to mendacious stories of German victories.

For the benefit of those who do not understand wireless, it may be explained that he could not, of course, send any wireless messages with his instrument, as this would have entailed the use of plant which he did not possess; also the illicit waves would at once have been detected by one of the German "police" sets maintained for this very purpose. A receiving set, on the other hand, cannot be detected or located except by actually finding the aerial or instrument.

Besides all this, there still existed in Lille organisations which kept the Allies informed

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by more certain methods of what was passing in the neighbourhood, and the counter-measures of the enemy, though they resulted in the arrest and condemnation of many hundreds, never entirely eradicated this ulcer.

Jean was a welcome recruit, and he was soon fully employed in gathering up the threads leading to his friends farther south, this work keeping him fully employed and taking him away a great deal from the city.

Incidentally he ascertained that Adrienne's friend at the sally-port at Maubeuge had paid the penalty for his patriotism, though, so far as they could ascertain, it was not apparently in direct connection with the letter which she had sent to him by the German Staff Officer.

Adrienne's position presented a more difficult problem, since she suffered a severe reaction after all she had been through, and was unfit for any very active work for a considerable period. However, it was arranged that a convent should take her under its wing for a time, as even the Germans were diffident about inquiring too closely into the doings of the sisters, and with them she soon recovered her health.

Valèrie was getting steadily worse, and eventually "le Curé" obtained permission to send some one to nurse her, and, in the guise of "Sister Marie," Adrienne returned to the big house, armed with the necessary papers and able to register her name on the

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front door, which just made all the difference between incessant anxiety and a feeling of comparative security.

But this state did not satisfy her ardent spirit for long, and she commenced to study ways and means of taking a more active part in the doings of the patriots. Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, she did not like to leave Valèrie for any length of time, and it was decided that she could be most useful in watching the German counter-espionage agents, who were numerous and efficient, and had recruited many traitors amongst the meaner classes of the inhabitants. These latter, as they became known, were carefully black-listed for present and future information, and more than one came to a sudden and mysterious end, whilst others no doubt have been suitably dealt with since the armistice.

Details of her work would not be particularly interesting, but one episode must be mentioned, as it had an important effect on subsequent developments.

The wireless receiving instrument was installed in a church tower, and it was Adrienne's duty, amongst others, to keep watch below in the evenings whilst the communiqués were being taken in—a task for which her garb rendered her eminently suitable, as being unlikely to arouse suspicion.

It was whilst so employed that she noticed a woman enter the church and engage appar-

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ently in devotions. There was nothing strange in that, but she remembered that she had seen this same person talking to a German in a café, and the two occurrences did not seem quite consistent. Adrienne watched her from between her fingers, and presently the woman got up and walked round past the door behind which lay the steps leading up to the tower. As she passed it she just glanced at it, and then left the church.

Quickly Adrienne pressed the electric switch, concealed under the seat, which warned the men in the tower that it was time to get away, and then she followed the woman, who eventually turned into the café where Adrienne had previously noticed her, and which was a place much frequented by German officers. She could not enter the café, dressed as she was, and was in some doubt whether to wait outside or to go home and change into her other disguise, which she wore when visiting such places. She decided to take the chance that the woman would have her evening meal there, and hurried home, whence she shortly emerged, dressed in Valèrie's clothes; and armed with that lady's papers, she boldly approached the café. Then a most unfortunate thing happened, for as she turned to enter she almost bumped into a German officer. The latter was about to apologise and pass on, when he caught sight of Adrienne's face, at the same moment as she recognised her former lodger,

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Major von Brittstein. "Ah, good evening, Mademoiselle, this is indeed an unexpected pleasure," said he; "and what may you be doing in Lille?" "Visiting a sick friend," said she promptly; "thanks to the kindness of the German authorities, who have been most sympathetic in the matter."

"Mademoiselle was about to enter the café—was she expecting to meet a friend?" said he, looking at her keenly, and evidently half expecting an admission that she was carrying on an intrigue with one of the German officers who formed a large part of the *clientèle*.

"*Mais non*, Monsieur, but France is so *triste*, and I was attracted by the lights, and was just going to peep inside."

All this time she was torn between anxiety to get away from the German officer, and fear of losing sight of the suspicious woman whom she had seen in the church; and when the Major said in his grandest manner: "Mademoiselle must do me the honour of permitting me to return the hospitality which she extended to me at her home," she took her courage in both hands and followed him in. Her quick eye noted the woman talking to a German officer at a table near the centre, and calling her escort's attention to an empty table close to them, she succeeded in steering him to it, despite his obvious predilections for a more secluded spot. Then, when they had sat down after the customary

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clicking of heels, Adrienne plunged boldly into the subject which was agitating her mind —viz., had he delivered her letter, and did he or did he not know that the recipient had subsequently been condemned as a spy?

"I have to thank Monsieur for delivering my letter to my friend at Maubeuge. I hope that Monsieur did not have great trouble in finding him, and that his journey was not delayed."

To her intense relief he replied that he had found the man where she had told him, and that it had been no trouble whatever; in any case, for such a charming lady one would do a great deal more—and he looked at her admiringly, for in Valèrie's clothes she certainly filled the eye. Since he made no further allusion to the subject, she concluded that he was unaware of the man's fate, and relieved of this fear, she set herself to carry on a desultory conversation, endeavouring to prevent him from becoming too familiar, and at the same time straining her ears to try and catch the conversation at the next table. This latter had ceased when Adrienne and her companion first sat down, but assuming either that they could not be overheard, or that a lady taking coffee with a German officer was not likely to be a dangerous eavesdropper, they gradually became less cautious.

Their conversation was evidently not the

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usual kind of garrison-town intrigue, and gradually she gathered that the subject was what she had suspected, for she caught words such as "*communiqué*," "*moral de la population*," "*l'église*."

At this point she had to concentrate her attention on her companion, who was bombarding her with questions about her sick relative, and pressing for her address. He was only passing through Lille, and would be leaving the following day; but in the meantime he had no work to do, and hoped that she would help him to forget the horrors of war during his brief stay. He himself was staying at an hotel, but he could well imagine that he would be more comfortable "*chez Mademoiselle*," if she had a spare room to offer him.

This was serious, for if he insisted on seeing her home, she knew that the whole fraud would be discovered. Whilst she was still racking her brains to think of a way out, without losing sight of the suspect, there was an unexpected diversion, for a party of German Security Police entered the café, and proceeded to inspect the identity papers of all civilians, which was not an unusual proceeding but singularly inopportune from Adrienne's point of view. Indeed she was in a quandary, for if von Brittstein asked to have a look at her papers, as he might quite well do in order to get her address, he would see at once that they were

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not hers at all. This must be avoided at all costs, and she began to search fruitlessly for her papers as the men approached them, finally saying to the Major, in seeming alarm, "Oh, what shall I do? I have come out without my *carte d'identité*."

"Never mind," said that officer; "I won't let these dogs worry you," and as one of them came to their table, he waved him magnificently away, saying: "The lady is a friend of mine, and we cannot be disturbed; I answer for her."

The man hesitated, for though he was within his rights and only doing his duty, a Staff Officer was not a pleasant person to tackle, as he soon found out, for he was glad to get away from von Brittstein's wrath, which followed an endeavour to insist on the production of the lady's papers.

Unfortunately, whilst the altercation was in progress, the couple at the next table had slipped out, and the consequences became clear next day, though they could not in any way be laid at Adrienne's door, since she had given an initial warning to the wireless operators.

Meantime, sitting in the café, she was still left with the problem of getting rid of von Brittstein, and the curfew hour was rapidly approaching. Finally she had to make a move, when that gentleman, as she had feared, announced his intention of seeing her home, with the evident wish to continue

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the conversation there. She tried various reasons to deter him from doing so, but finally was forced to assent to his seeing her at any rate as far as the door, as he would not take "No" for an answer.

They went out together and made their way to a side street not far from the café, where she stopped outside an imposing-looking door.

"I hope Monsieur will not insist on coming in to-night," she said; "because *ma tante* is very ill, and I fear that the arrival of a strange German officer might seriously agitate her. Besides, *mon oncle* does not love Germans, and I should not like Monsieur to be insulted after his kindness to me. If, however, Monsieur will do us the honour to take *déjeuner* at our humble table to-morrow, I will in the meantime explain how good he has been to me, both at my home and again this evening, and they will be very proud to entertain such a distinguished guest. Monsieur will not be leaving, he said, till two o'clock, so if he will come at twelve, we shall be able to have a long talk; and as *ma tante* is confined to bed and *mon oncle* is going to Roubaix on business, we shall be *tête-à-tête*," she added, with a meaning smile. The idea of avoiding the uncle decided the German to agree to this compromise, and he accepted the invitation with a fairly good grace.

"I will just wait before going in till Monsieur is out of sight, as I must think of what

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les domestiques may say if they see me at this hour with a German officer. Monsieur is sure he can find the house again? Good night, then, and *à demain.*" She hoped that she was going to get rid of him, but he was not prepared to be dismissed quite as summarily as this, and insisted on an immediate reward, which she was obliged to concede, after which he at last departed.

She waited until he had turned the corner, and then hurried off in the opposite direction, reaching Valèrie's house without further incident. The latter was able to identify the big house as belonging to one of the oldest and proudest families in Lille, and the two were convulsed with mirth as they pictured the reception which von Brittstein was likely to get when he presented himself for lunch next day; in fact, Valèrie's sense of humour proved to be much stronger than her heart, and she had eventually to be put to bed in a state of collapse.

As has been indicated above, the news which "le Curé" brought next morning showed that the laugh had not been entirely against the enemy, for the church had been raided the previous evening whilst Adrienne was detained in the café, and evidently the woman and her companion had gone out to put the finishing touches to their arrangements.

The operators had got away in response to Adrienne's warning, but had foolishly not removed the essential parts of the ap-

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paratus, which had been discovered by the Germans and were absolutely irreplaceable in the "occupied" territory. No arrests had been made, but the old priest expected considerable trouble for a time, and the band of patriots would have to keep quiet until the storm blew over. He was very sorrowful at the loss of the wireless instrument, as apart from the communiqués, word had been sent to England that instructions could be received by its means, and now some one would have to go there to bring back fresh valves. There were a certain number of envoys available, including Jean, who had done the trip once already, but he was engaged in other important work, and could ill be spared.

Application had been made to the Germans that Valèrie should go with the next batch of *repatriés*, but no one had any idea when it would leave, nor even if she would be included in the party. Also she was hardly in a fit state of health to get back again *en fraude*, which was an essential part of any plan.

Adrienne said she was quite prepared to try to get to Holland in the same way that Jean had done, and "le Curé" agreed that this might be a solution as a last resort, but he thought that she had already run quite sufficient risks, and hoped it would not be necessary to select her. So for the time being they left it at that, the parting instruc-

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tions of the old man being that she was to lie low, in case von Brittstein had circulated her description to the police.

Adrienne's own opinion was that he would not have done so, as the incident did not redound to his credit, and he would be unaware that she was "wanted" as a deserter from a labour gang.

It was only some three nights later when, after they had retired to bed, they were roused by a furious knocking at the front door. Léonie was sent down to ascertain what was wanted, and found two Germans, who stated that they had come to fetch Valèrie. Their instructions were to wait for her, as she was to proceed by train that night, having been selected for repatriation, and they could only give her fifteen minutes to prepare for the journey. Léonie informed the men that her mistress was very ill, and that she did not know whether she could accompany them; but their reply was that if she did not come willingly they would be forced to pull her out of bed and take her as she was, and unless Léonie took the message at once they would have to do so themselves.

The poor woman, knowing that they were quite capable of carrying out their threat, hurried upstairs to deliver the message, and found Adrienne in a dressing-gown, sitting on her mistress's bed, and holding her hand to calm her, for they both thought that one

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or both of them was to be arrested, and Léonie's news was reassuring to a certain extent. Valèrie had long been looking forward to rejoining her mother, but now that the time had actually come, she shuddered at the thought of the journey, and with good reason doubted whether she would arrive alive at the other end. However, she got up and made an effort to dress, but quickly collapsed again on to the bed, and Adrienne saw that it would be a great risk to let her attempt the journey.

An idea struck her.

"Shall I go in your place?" she said. "We are rather alike, and I might get through, and you could go to the convent, where you would be well looked after. Then I could bring back the instrument required by 'le Curé,' and I could see your mother, and when I return I could tell you all about her, and how your brothers are." Valèrie saw the advantages of the proposal both to herself and also to the cause, and to do her justice it was the latter which really decided the question in her mind. "Yes," she gasped; and to assist Adrienne she forced herself to don the latter's uniform, and to accompany her downstairs in the guise of a sister looking after her patient.

The men compared the papers, and in the half light and muffled up as she was, Adrienne passed muster. They might have been more careful had it ever occurred to them that a

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person who had been selected for repatriation would voluntarily surrender the golden opportunity. The nurse offered to accompany her patient to the station, but, to the relief of both, the men brusquely refused to permit it, and after a last embrace Adrienne was marched off to the station, where she was put into a carriage, crowded with women, and with the blinds drawn down. Shortly afterwards the train left, the occupants having been warned that any one found moving the blinds or attempting to look out of the window would be summarily dealt with.

The whole procedure of the Germans in arranging the manner of this exodus was not dictated by either humanity or brutality, but was the result of careful calculation. To get spies behind the Allied lines was almost impossible except through Switzerland, for the sea and England, with its excellent counter-espionage system, barred the northern route. As time went on, the watch on the Franco-Swiss frontier became increasingly severe, whilst to penetrate into the areas actually occupied by the armies was practically impossible, except to persons who had the very best reasons for wishing to do so. Consequently, by sending home large bodies of inhabitants *viâ* Switzerland, the Germans killed two birds with one stone, for they themselves got rid of, and saddled the Allies with, a large number of useless mouths, and at the same time found a con-

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venient means of passing through a limited number of persons, mixed up in the crowd, to spy for them.

There was, of course, the inevitable danger that the *repatriés* would give a certain amount of valuable information to the Allies, but this danger was reduced to a minimum by keeping the composition of the party secret until the last minute, and by removing the individuals summarily at night, in the manner which has been described above. The fact that the journey through the area occupied by the German Armies was carried out at night also helped in preventing any information from being gained, and Adrienne could bear witness to the efficiency of the methods adopted in the case of the ordinary *repatrié*. Unfortunately for themselves, the enemy on this occasion were carrying a passenger very different from the ordinary run, and this was thanks to sheer bad luck and not to any extreme sagacity on the part of the patriots, for the idea which Adrienne adopted on the spur of the moment had never even occurred to them.

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CHAPTER XVI.

ADRIENNE IS REPATRIATED BY THE ENEMY.

THERE is no need to describe the slow and tedious journey through Belgium and then up the east bank of the Rhine. The conditions were miserable, but Adrienne, being young and strong, had less cause for complaint than the majority of the passengers who were being evacuated for a precisely opposite reason.

There were some, however, who appeared to be able-bodied, and mindful of the stories which she had heard, Adrienne regarded these with special interest.

One in particular attracted her attention, for it was none other than the woman who had denounced their wireless operations, and she endeavoured to watch her without being observed.

Somewhat to her alarm, after a halt at Cologne, this person got into her carriage, and she wondered whether she suspected her. She was not left long in doubt, for at the first opportunity the woman asked her whether

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she had not seen her at Lille in the Café de la Paix, and what she had done with the handsome German officer by whom she was escorted on that occasion. Adrienne guessed that the object of the inquiry was really to find out whether the woman's own escort had been noticed on the same occasion, and she replied that she had no recollection of ever having seen her before, though she admitted that she had a German friend, and had been to the café with him. Adrienne was still very nervous lest the woman should suspect her and get her sent back, so she decided to play a bold game. She therefore went on to explain, of course in the strictest confidence, that she had been very fond of the Major, and now that he had been transferred to the Argonne, where she was not well enough to follow him, she was glad to be going back to her mother. Please God, the war would soon be over and then she could join him in Germany, as he had promised to marry her after the war. The woman was now fairly sure that her secret was safe, and though she agreed with Adrienne that the Allies had little hope of staving off defeat much longer, she expressed unalterable loathing for the Boche and all his works—astonishment that a girl like Adrienne should have anything to do with them, and much more of the same kind, to all of which Adrienne listened with her tongue in her cheek, and got quite heated as she defended the Germans

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in general and her friend in particular. In spite of what the woman said, Adrienne's suspicions were confirmed, and she had no doubt as to why she was making the journey.

She felt, however, that she had overdone her part when they reached the frontier station, where they were to stay a night before crossing into Switzerland. There the whole party were thoroughly searched, and though they were neither scrubbed nor were their heads shaved, the investigation included practically every other precautionary measure known to modern science. Adrienne had the doubtful honour of a special interview, carried out with every care to prevent its being observed by the other passengers. After being searched, she was ushered into a private room, and for a moment feared that she was caught when almost in sight of safety. However, the German officer's manner, which was his strong suit, soon set her mind at rest, for he addressed her most courteously in excellent French.

"I see that Mademoiselle is being evacuated on account of her health, and I trust that the journey, which unfortunately is very trying, has not been too much for her strength." Adrienne had long since discovered that in the matter of flattery it was almost impossible to overdo it when dealing with a German, so she replied: "Oh no, Monsieur; I well understand the difficulties of transport in time of war, and can assure you that the

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German authorities have tried, as they always do, to make things comfortable for us; and I, for one, am none the worse, and have no complaints to make." He smiled in a gratified manner, and replied: "I understand that Mademoiselle has a great friend in the German Army; we must hope that this wretched war will soon be over, and that friendship between French and Germans will no longer be accounted a crime in your country. Mademoiselle would perhaps be disposed to assist in bringing that to pass?" he added tentatively.

Adrienne at first pretended not to understand what he meant, and when he endeavoured to make his meaning clearer, she indignantly protested that she could not do anything which would harm France; but she gradually yielded to his eloquence to the extent of agreeing that the English were quite a different matter, and that love must take precedence of everything. From this it was not a very long step to the logical conclusion that it was her duty to help her lover's country, if she could do so without hurting her own.

The German could scarcely conceal his delight, for it must be remembered that he thought the lady before him was Valèrie de ——, whose social position was unexceptional. Here, indeed, was a potential spy of a far higher class than any he had hitherto succeeded in recruiting, and one who would not

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find it difficult to penetrate into the "Zone of the Armies," and establish friendships with people who might be expected to know things. With her face and figure the rest would be easy.

Would she do him the honour of dining with him? and after displaying an appropriate degree of reluctance and wonder as to whether her German lover would like it, she eventually agreed.

The man's complacency and evident confidence in the effect of his good looks and charm of manner inwardly infuriated her, but as the road she was travelling promised to provide information which might be of great value to her friends on the other side, she suppressed her disgust at being taken for the sort of person who would betray her country or its Allies.

Shortly after, they were being whirled along in a closed car to an unknown destination, and this proved to be the famous German espionage Bureau at Lörrach, which poured out a stream of spies through Switzerland, directed against France.

The dinner was a trying ordeal, and the subsequent interview even more so, but she managed to play her rôle successfully, for three hours later she rejoined the remainder of the passengers in their temporary quarters, having in her pocket a doped handkerchief, 300 francs sewn in the hem of her skirt, and in her brain several addresses. Last, but

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not least important, she had a paper containing the headings on which the Germans wanted her to report, which paper she was to destroy before crossing the frontier.

Otherwise the information she had acquired was rather disappointing, for despite her urgent representations that she could do little if she was to work entirely by herself, the officer had declined to put her in personal touch with any one in France—which showed that he knew his business a good deal better than might have been imagined from his dealings with Adrienne. Also he had insisted on knowing the name of her German lover, and on the spur of the moment she had given that of her old enemy, the Town Major, which perhaps was not very wise—but of her small circle of German acquaintances, she could not think of any one who was dead. She comforted herself with the thought, that amongst so many victims, the elderly "Don Juan" might well have forgotten the names of a few, and that he was not the sort of man ever to disclaim a conquest.

The party crossed the frontier next morning, and to Adrienne, after three years' bondage, the change seemed extraordinary and at first almost incomprehensible. To be cheered by the kindly Swiss as they passed through the stations; to be overwhelmed with kindness when the train stopped, and to see signs of peace and prosperity on every side, was a strange contrast to the squalid

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misery to which she had been accustomed in the occupied territory, and gave an air of unreality to the whole journey. Eventually they passed through the Jura and halted at Pontarlier, where the refugees were examined, but this time by a friendly and sympathetic Allied Intelligence Bureau, consisting of a French officer, several French subordinates, and a young English officer. It was to this latter that Adrienne addressed herself when she was brought into the office. "I am working with Jean, the agent of the British Army, and I have information for the British Staff which perhaps I ought to give to Monsieur privately." From Jean's accounts she had imagined that he was a famous hero in the British Army, but to her surprise his name seemed to convey nothing to any one. "But before I do that," she continued, "I may be able to assist *Messieurs les Commissaires* in the examination of the refugees, and will denounce one traitor who is on the train"; and she explained the case of the woman who had travelled with her. "I also have been to the Spy Bureau at Lörrach, and am in the pay of the Germans!" The Frenchmen, whose faces had fallen at her first statement that she was working for the British, now regarded her with intense interest, and as she proceeded with her story and produced her exhibits their enthusiasm knew no bounds. The handkerchief would explain why their censorship was producing no re-

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sults, for Adrienne's instructions were to soak a corner in water and then write with the resulting solution, a fact which indicated a new and unknown medium, not possible of detection by their existing methods.

For the benefit of the reader, it may be explained that such letters were to be posted in the ordinary way in France, addressed to one or other of the addresses in Switzerland given to Adrienne, whence they would be forwarded to Lörrach, and the secret writing between the lines of the apparently harmless letter would there be developed with the appropriate chemical.

She told them how the German officer had insisted on concealing the 300 francs in her skirt, because, if the French found it, she could then say that she had smuggled it out, otherwise her countrymen would suspect her; and they quite appreciated the humour of this, and told her she could keep it as her perquisite.

"Nothing would induce me to use their dirty money," interjected Adrienne; "and what is more, you may draw the further 300 francs a week which I can get, if my reports are satisfactory, by calling for letters addressed to me, *poste restante*, at a certain post-office in Paris, from which centre I am to try and get information about the British Army"—and she showed them the *questionnaire* which had been given to her.

She also told them how she had absolutely

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refused to spy against the French Army, fond as she was of a certain German, but had allowed herself to be persuaded that *Perfide Albion* was fighting to the last Frenchman, and was really the enemy of the whole civilised world, including her beloved France. As a patriotic Frenchwoman, she had agreed that she would only be carrying out her duty in doing everything possible to harm that deceitful race. At this the Frenchman began to chaff the young Englishman unmercifully, until Adrienne intervened by saying that she had only met one English officer, but Monsieur might indeed be proud of his Army if there were many more like him in it. The young Englishman, rather overwhelmed at the unexpected compliment from such a charming girl, made shift to thank her, and, it must be admitted, did not make a very good job of it. The French officer then continued the conversation, by saying jocularly: "My young colleague here will be able to provide Mademoiselle with the very best information obtainable for the money, and with his assistance you will get the Iron Cross from 'Guillaume' for your charming friend at Lörrach. We are already supplying him with quite a quantity of news, and I must say this for him—he pays us well. As for the woman in the train, you need not worry further; we will attend to her." After some further discussion with the Frenchman, the young English officer informed Adrienne that he would

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make himself responsible for her future welfare, and would arrange in the first instance for her to visit Valèrie's mother, which promise he duly carried out, ultimately accompanying her to Paris, where he handed her over to another British officer.

Adrienne parted from him with some regret, for he was a gentleman, whose sole preoccupation was how to get away to a fighting job, from which his fatal linguistic qualifications had so far debarred him.

It was not to sit at Pontarlier that he had left his work at the first call of his country, and by dint of sheer persistency had succeeded in getting to France in the early days of the war.

Poor boy, his ambition was eventually only too fully realised.

From the British Adrienne received instructions which enabled her to send regular reports, containing the most accurate and valuable information, which included a warning of the Messines attack, and of a big surprise prepared for the Germans, the exact nature of which she could not ascertain. True, this information only reached Switzerland some hours after several hundred Germans had been blown into eternity by the British mines, but the Paris postmark—by arrangement—showed clearly that the letter had been sent off before the event, and it was apparently sheer bad luck that the French postal authorities had hung up all

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the letters for two or three days on this particular occasion. The gentleman at Lörrach felt certain that it was only a question of time before he would make a really big scoop, thanks to this priceless agent, "Number L. 139."

It was only when her reports ceased to come that he began to have doubts, but even this might be due to the arrest of his paymaster, who supplied her with funds, and if he could only get into touch with her again he hoped that all might still be well.

The real facts were that Adrienne was required for other work, and the Allies rightly concluded that the arrest of the paymaster would account for the stopping of the reports and cover up her tracks, at least for a time. Also the viper in their midst had had a considerably longer run than they were accustomed to give to this class of person, and they were glad to put the paymaster away, *pour encourager les autres.*

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CHAPTER XVII.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

A CONSIDERABLE time had elapsed when we next meet Adrienne, heavily veiled, being conveyed one evening in a closed car to Boulogne *en route* for England.

Having gone through the usual formalities, she passed up the gangway of the mail steamer, and settled herself down in a deck-chair in a corner, whence she could see the usual crowd of British, mixed with a few French and Belgians, hurrying along the quay, many of them still covered in mud and dust from the trenches, and carrying trophies, such as rifles, shell-cases, &c. Despite the evident protests of the proud owners, the argument with the military police on the gangways always ended in the same manner —viz., in the removal of the trophy in question. One senior officer, a Canadian, who had attempted to get a rifle on board, took this in very bad part, and created quite a disturbance generally, until all the officials in the neighbourhood appeared to have become in-

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volved in the argument, and most of the passengers also were watching to see what the outcome of the dispute would be. Finally the Canadian, still clutching the rifle, and followed by the irate officials, went off to refer the matter to the embarkation commandant. Then the true inwardness of the matter became apparent, for amidst cheers from the ship, the Canadian officer's retinue, who had been taking cover behind some railway trucks on the quay, marched proudly up the now unguarded gangway, carrying machine-guns, trench-mortars, and rifles galore.

Apparently, according to the rules of the game, once they were on board they were beyond the jurisdiction of the embarkation officials, for Adrienne observed that no attempt was made to take them away again when the main body of the officials returned, having obtained possession of the offending rifle.

The episode reminded her of Jean and his smuggling exploits, and quite cheered her up. But there was still better to follow, for as preparations were being made to get the ship started, a car dashed up to the entrance of the station, and a young Flying Corps officer jumped out and ran along the quay, only just in time to get aboard before the gangways were removed.

Adrienne's heart gave a jump and then began to beat violently, for after she had given up all hope of ever seeing him again,

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at the eleventh hour fate had miraculously brought to her the only British officer in whom she took any real interest. Until this moment, indeed, she had never realised how deep the interest actually was.

She sat still, wondering if he would come in her direction; if he would recognise her; if he did recognise her, whether he would want to speak to her, and many other things which are better imagined than expressed.

For some time she saw him no more, and then he came up on to her deck and stood leaning over the side talking to two other officers. Still Adrienne did not move, and at last her patience was rewarded, for he came along in her direction. She had taken the precaution to raise her veil, and as he threw a casual glance at her, she smiled shyly at him. For a moment he stopped in astonishment, then came up to her, his face beaming, and with the banal remark, "How on earth did you get here, Mademoiselle?" But the actual words did not matter, since in any case Adrienne would not have noticed what he said, for the look on his face was quite sufficient answer to her doubts and fears.

He brought a chair up to hers, and the two were soon deep in conversation.

Archer's story was quickly told, for it consisted merely of the humdrum life of a ferry pilot, though the girl found it interesting enough. Then she recounted her adventures: how she had been taken away from her

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village, though she modestly slurred over the Town Major's share in that episode, and how she had heard an aeroplane at midnight on the journey, and had thought of "Monsieur Archaire."

She had already heard from Jean the facts about this flight, but she pretended ignorance, partly to give him the pleasure of telling her himself, and partly with the object of drawing him out, in which her manœuvre was completely successful.

"But it *was* me that you heard! How splendid! Jean and I thought it had been an absolute dud, when we could not find the rendezvous, and after all, it wasn't—by Jove! What a bit of luck!"

So they talked on, and the time flew so fast that it seemed only a minute or two before they found themselves in sight of the white cliffs and Folkestone harbour, and Archer then began to press Adrienne as to her future movements. He must see her again—where was she staying? Would she go and visit his mother? and he would try and get away for a day or two when she was there; that would be grand! and his mother would love to have her.

Adrienne only shook her head sadly, and to all his entreaties replied that she was going on an important mission, and, as at present arranged, expected to leave England the following day.

"No, I cannot tell Monsieur what the

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mission is, for I do not think 'le Commandant' would wish it."

"But surely you can tell *me*," urged Archer, "for you know I would not tell any one else; besides, I've worked for the Intelligence."

"Well, I suppose there would be no harm in saying that I am going back to Lille, but I must not tell you any more." But womanlike she could not keep to this resolve, and he was horrified to learn that she was going to smuggle through some valves for the wireless installation—for having made the journey himself, he appreciated the dangers, and felt cold all over at the idea of her crossing the electric fence.

He would have been still more alarmed had he known the full extent of her mission, but by this time the ship was being tied up and it was time to think about getting on shore, whilst Adrienne had to join the other civilians in the saloon for examination by the British police, though in her case this was a pure formality, as they had been warned to expect her, and an officer was actually waiting to take charge of her.

"I have to go back to Lymphe, but I will wait for you at the station entrance," said Archer as she left him. And there she found him half an hour later, and begged the officer who had met her to excuse her for a moment, as she wished to say good-bye to a friend.

"You will write and tell me where I can

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see you, if you do not go at once; you promise me you will?" and, emboldened by the darkness, Archer took both her hands, and added, "*chère Adrienne.*"

"Yes, I promise," she said, smiling bravely and pressing his fingers; "and if you do not hear, you will know that I have started; and you must not worry about me, for as you and Jean always said, I am *très-débrouillard.*"

"But how shall I know how you get on over there?" said Archer. "It's horrible to think what may happen to you; could not I go instead? I did the journey once, and they might let me go again; anyway I could try."

"No," replied the girl. "No one but I can do this business, and you would not have a chance of success. Cheer up! Whatever happens, I promise to let you know if I come to any harm, and so long as you do not hear you may assume that I am safe. Now I really cannot keep that poor man waiting any longer."

Perhaps Archer was shy, or perhaps, as is more probable, he felt that it would be dishonourable to take advantage of the girl's friendless position, for after a silent but eloquent interval, he raised her hand to his lips and then dropped it quickly.

In thinking over their last interview, as she did many times in the succeeding months, Adrienne came to the very definite conclusion

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that the circumstances would have justified him in proceeding to a stage beyond merely kissing her hand, but the fact remains that he did not do so, and whilst secretly regretting his insular reserve, she honoured him for it.

Next morning he took a plane across the Channel for the last time, and she left by train for London.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

ADRIENNE RETURNS TO HER POST.

It was with feelings of some regret that Adrienne stepped on board the Dutch boat at Harwich.

At first she had found the British somewhat cold, and lacking in the small attentions to which she was accustomed in France—in fact, they had seemed rather afraid of her; but this impression soon wore off, and she began to appreciate the calm courtesy and respect with which she was invariably treated. Even the Intelligence Officer at Harwich, who had, by order and for the benefit of the other passengers, treated her with considerable suspicion and been anything but polite, had managed unobtrusively to convey his sympathy for her, and as the boat finally cleared the harbour she felt as if she was leaving friends whom she had known for years, instead of only a few weeks.

Her fellow-passengers were a heterogeneous collection, and though they had presumably been passed by the British authorities, Adri-

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enne had been warned to be careful, as it was a moral certainty that the immunity of these boats from submarine attack was not entirely due to consideration for the Dutch, and that there were enemy agents aboard. As she stepped on deck, carrying her sole luggage in the shape of an old compressed cane suit-case, a good many eyes were turned admiringly in the direction of the pretty girl in the simple blue serge coat and short skirt, under which appeared well-turned ankles and a serviceable pair of boots, the heels of which, incidentally, contained several notes of high value.

Even in war-time any sea voyage is very like any other, and there is no necessity to describe this particular one, nor yet the Customs inspection at Rotterdam.

Adrienne's old suit-case was thoroughly ransacked, but presumably contained nothing beyond what a young lady carries on such occasions; at any rate, the Customs officials were apparently quite satisfied, and they, no doubt, are excellent judges in these matters.

As a matter of fact, some one, who was probably an even greater expert, appeared to have gone through it on the boat; for Adrienne, who by instruction carried it unlocked and had left it for a moment or two in the saloon, found that the contents had been turned over, and this gave her a distinctly unpleasant sensation, which was not improved when she observed that she was

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being shadowed from the quay to the small hotel to which she had been directed to make her way.

She had been warned that the place swarmed with German spies, *agents provocateurs*, and the sort of international race-course riff-raff which collects in neutral countries on the fringes of the war zone, and lives by its wits on the misfortunes of others. Her instructions were to stay there until some one arrived, whom she would know by the fact that he or she would present her with a pin; and she was to trust no one else.

If the worst came to the worst, she might apply for help to a certain gentleman, but this should be avoided if possible.

Time hung heavy on her hands, and the fact that she was constantly watched began to get on her nerves; for, by looking into plate-glass windows and by suddenly retracing her steps, she caught frequent glimpses of the man who had followed her from the boat, and who now appeared to have taken up his abode in the same hotel.

One morning, when she was sitting in the lounge after her morning *café-au-lait*, a smartly dressed Belgian planted himself near her, and entered into conversation. He was waiting for his passes to be viséd for England, where his family already were—and what was she doing? Was she also going to England? If so, they might be fellow-passengers.

Adrienne replied, as instructed, that she

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was waiting for her grandmother, who was hoping to get a pass from the Germans to come out of France. If the old lady did not arrive soon, she supposed she would have to try and get permission to go in, but she did not know whether there was any chance of its being granted. The man then hinted that there were ways of getting in and out without any such permission, and finally whispered to her, "Have you tried ——?" mentioning the name of the man to whom she had been instructed to go as a last resort. Adrienne, now thoroughly on her guard, disclaimed any knowledge of such a person, but was quite glad to hear anything her kind friend could tell her about him, which he proceeded to do at some length, but under a strict promise of secrecy, which she solemnly swore to observe.

She gathered that if she was prepared to work for the Allies, the person in question would certainly be able to get her across the frontier, and pass her on to where her grandmother lived, by means of various friends on the other side. Adrienne thanked him for his kind offer—for so, she said, she understood it to be,—but she had not the courage to do anything so daring, and if she could only get her grandmother safe to England, she intended to stay there till the war was over. She only hoped that would be soon; for though it might be all right for the men, it was very hard on the unfortunate women.

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"Ah, well, Mademoiselle," said he, as rather crestfallen he left her, "yours is not a very heroic point of view, and one which fortunately is not shared by the majority of your country-women; but no doubt it is a wise one." Adrienne did not need his assurance on this point, for she thought that he might be a German *agent provocateur*, and hoped that she had seen the last of him.

But she was not to be left in peace, for another man approached her on the following day, but in quite a different manner. He had apparently found out all about her having come from England, which, of course, she did not attempt to deny; but he also knew apparently that she had been repatriated from Lille some time previously. This was rather disturbing, but when he went on to hint that the Germans could put their hand on her sister Lucille, the announcement did not quite have the devastating effect which he evidently expected, as Adrienne thereby knew that the enemy was unaware that the real Valèrie was still in Lille and had never left it.

Whilst she fenced with his questions, she was thinking rapidly whether she should make a clean breast of her connection with Lörrach. If she did so, they might let her go to France, but it was far more likely that they would either send her straight to Lörrach or would want her to return to England for them at once, using the pretext with the

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British authorities that she had been unable to get across the frontier. Besides, she had her instructions, and felt that she was bound to follow them, as otherwise she might upset some one else's arrangements, apart from failing to carry out her own particular mission. It was really the thought of the latter which decided her, for the plan, though attractive, was, on the whole, much too uncertain to take her to Lille; and when he asked her whether she had ever been to Lörrach, she replied that she had never heard of the place, and that even if she had, she was not in the habit of discussing such matters with perfect strangers.

Then at last he came out into the open, and said, "You need have no secrets from me; I know you have been working for the Germans, and I am doing so too; we are comrades, *hein?*"

Adrienne's hot French blood boiled, and she felt inclined to hit him in the face, but restrained herself, and merely said, "Monsieur is wasting his time; I am not working for any one, and have no intention of doing so. Even if I were, I should certainly not require the assistance of Monsieur."

At this the man completely lost his temper, and snarled: "Then you decline my assistance and refuse to go to Antwerp, where you would be well received? Idiot! You will regret your folly when 'la Dame Blonde' gets hold of you or your sister, and I promise

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you that your incompetent friend at Lörrach will not be able to protect you"; and he got up and stalked out of the hotel, evidently in a towering rage, leaving Adrienne considerably mystified and also a trifle amused.

However, after thinking the matter over, she came to some comforting conclusions—viz., that the fascinating gentleman at Lörrach evidently still considered her to be working for him, and that a woman at Antwerp, for some occult reason, wanted to detach her from his service—for she could hardly suppose that it was merely professional jealousy between two rival espionage centres.

She wondered what the next move would be, but was not left long in doubt, for when she went up to her room that night, and after locking the door began to undress, she discovered under her night attire an envelope, and opening it, found that it contained a slip of paper with the words "*ne fermez pas la porte,*"—and stuck through the paper was a pin. She unlocked the door, and hastily began to dress again, in some anxiety lest her visitor might arrive before the process was completed. But her fears on this score were groundless, for the unknown writer had correctly foreseen the situation in which his message might be expected to find her, and gave her ample time to rectify deficiencies. It was at least an hour later when a youngish man entered her room without any warning, and quickly shut the door behind him. Adri-

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enne felt that the situation was distinctly embarrassing, but his business-like manner, and the fact that he was obviously an Englishman, quickly reassured her, and he lost no time in coming to the first point, which was that his room was in the same passage, and that therefore they were able to meet without danger of being observed.

He had made the necessary arrangements to get her across the frontier in the company of a reliable Frenchman, who in the first instance would take her as far as Brussels, whence her onward journey to Lille would be arranged. He supposed she had still got the valves safely? and she nodded, and pointed to the suit-case, remarking, "Two complete sets."

"Very good," said he; "it is not safe to take them out here, and they had better stay where they are till just before you cross the frontier, when my men will dispose of the case for you."

"But what about the other things I have brought?" she asked. "There is not very much of them, of course, for I believe the rest is already over, but I suppose the whole lot ought to be put together somewhere?"

"That is all right, Mademoiselle; the remainder went across a long time ago, and has arrived safely at Courtrai, but, of course, it is no good without your consignment. The Belgians made rather a mess of the business, and I can't think why they left it to the last

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moment to get your parcel over. You had better take it on to Lille in the first instance, and arrange to send it from there to Courtrai. Are you quite confident you know the cipher?" and he took out a pencil and paper, and Adrienne, after rapidly drawing a diagram, enciphered and deciphered a few words to his complete satisfaction. Then he pulled a map out of his pocket, and asked her a series of questions, to which her replies were also apparently entirely satisfactory, for he finally folded it up again, with the remark, "Mademoiselle has evidently been completely instructed, and I congratulate her on her intelligence."

It was midnight when he got up to go, his parting remark being, "Don't forget—10.30 A.M. to-morrow at the station, and look out for a man in a brown squash hat with a black ribbon, and a small feather in the left-hand side of it; also he will have black boots, with one brown and one black boot-lace. You will wear a flower and carry your suit-case in your left hand. Here's your ticket. Please turn out your light whilst I go."

A sudden thought struck Adrienne. "Would Monsieur do me a favour?" she asked. "If anything should happen to me, I promised a friend that I would let him know. In that case could I send Monsieur a message for him? If so, how should I address it?"

He thought for a moment, and then he

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wrote down a few words, saying, "I most sincerely trust that the necessity will not arise, but if you send a letter to this address, it will not compromise you, even if the Germans do see it, provided that you are careful what you say; but I need hardly instruct you on that point."

"My friend's address is in this envelope," replied Adrienne, "and perhaps Monsieur will do me the favour not to open it unless it should be necessary. I am deeply grateful to Monsieur." The latter began to fidget as he said, "Well, good night, Mademoiselle; that will be all right"; and then, touched apparently by the human note which her last request had introduced into an otherwise purely business discussion, he added with real feeling, "I wish you the very best of luck, and cannot say how much we all appreciate your courage and self-sacrifice. So long as France produces women like you, how can she ever be beaten!" and then, as if ashamed at his own emotion, he hurriedly left, before Adrienne could thank him or even turn out the light. The charming smile, with which she was beginning to do so, still lingered for some time after the door had closed,—as she thought to herself—how like an Englishman! how like my Archer! full of the kindest thoughts, but horribly ashamed of himself if he ever allows them to appear on the surface; what dear funny people! And the soft smile recurred at intervals, until she finally dropped off to sleep.

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Two evenings later a party of four men and one girl might have been seen in a little whitewashed room in a village to the south-west of Breda, busily engaged in carrying out a surgical operation on Adrienne's suit-case. After cutting carefully round the edges on the inside they lifted out a false bottom, disclosing what looked like four small electric-light bulbs, carefully packed in cotton-wool, together with several yards of thin rope, some small metal tubes, and half a dozen flat metal discs.

"We must divide these equally between us," said the girl, "so that if anything happens to either of us, the other can go on. In that case the survivor will hand over his portion to 'le Curé' at Lille,"—and she proceeded to give one of the men very exact indications as to where the old priest lived. "Where shall we meet if we get separated?" and it was finally decided that the rendezvous should be in Brussels, at the address indicated by the officer who had come to her room at Rotterdam; but whilst the man was to wait for Adrienne for two days, the latter would proceed as rapidly as possible to Lille, as she had secret instructions for "le Curé," which were to be imparted to no one else, and this for very excellent reasons, which will be appreciated later.

Adrienne hid the bulbs in the bosom of her dress and made a parcel of the other articles, which she put in her coat pocket, and the

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man with the ill-assorted boot-laces stowed his away also. All preliminaries having been arranged, the party waited till darkness, as the Dutch frontier police could not be relied upon not to arrest them, either on real suspicion of smuggling or because they were paid to help the Germans, and then they cautiously made their way down the road towards the frontier, one man carrying a wooden frame about three feet square. After a time they left the road and proceeded across the fields.

Whether the enemy felt confidence in the deterrent qualities of the electrified fence, or whether their terrific losses at Arras and Messines had forced them to economise in men is uncertain, but, whatever the reason, Adrienne was rather surprised to observe no signs of the searchlights which had nearly cost Jean his life. To her whispered inquiry one of her companions assured her that they were quite close to the fence, and that with luck they might get over before the lights were turned on. Shortly afterwards he motioned her to take shelter behind some low bushes, and the three men went on to scout, leaving her in charge of the square frame, to the outer edge of which were fixed a series of grooved rubber blocks.

It is idle to deny that the darkness and the memory of Jean's experiences combined to frighten the brave girl, and a heavy shower of rain did not tend to improve matters. It

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was a relief when the men returned, and her friend with the boot-laces, who answered to the name of Jules, motioned to her to follow him. They proceeded across a series of drainage cuts, running through alternating patches of soaking lucerne and standing corn; and at last Jules stopped behind a bush and pointed to their front, whispering, "the fence!" By straining her eyes, Adrienne could dimly make out the obstacle which had been so graphically described to her by Jean, and knowing what she did, it sent a chill down her back.

The two men crawled forward with the frame, Jules and Adrienne following, and they all lay down some twenty yards from the fence, listening intently. It gradually became evident to Adrienne that they had correctly bisected the interval between two pickets, and after a short halt they all crept forward to the middle point between two of the uprights of the fence. The two men fitted the grooves on the upper rubber pads against the second strand from the bottom, and gently raised the frame until the pads on the lower edge of the frame could be slipped over the bottom strand, when Jules, whispering, "Come along and mind your skirt," crawled forward, and stepped through the insulated gap formed by the frame.

The advice as regards her skirt was unnecessary, for Adrienne had already slipped it off, not wishing to get it covered with mud,

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since she might have to appear in it in daylight next morning. Carrying it over her arm, she stepped quickly through, and lay down alongside him. The two men stealthily removed the frame, and took it back a short distance; then they separated, one going to each of the nearest sentries with a view to creating a diversion, and attracting attention whilst their friends got away. They had no difficulty in doing so by mentioning the fascinating subject of butter, fat, and tobacco, which they were prepared to part with at bargain prices, provided that the Germans would look the other way when some Belgians escaped into Holland the following night.

This naturally started what promised to develop into an interminable argument, but unfortunately one of the picket commanders intervened, and said that unless the Belgian cleared off at once it would be the worse for him. The man withdrew a short distance, and then, perhaps with the idea of continuing the diversion, but more probably out of bravado—for like most Belgians he could not resist the temptation to get some of his own back from the hated enemy in such favourable circumstances,—he commenced to hurl every kind of abuse at the Germans, both in their own language and his own. This was too much for them. The picket commander lost his temper, and, strictly against all orders, opened a fusilade into the darkness in his direction, on which the Belgian

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retired with remarkable alacrity, and the worthy *Landstürmers* gradually recovered their equanimity and settled down again.

In the meantime Adrienne and Jules had safely crossed the dangerous hundred yards between the two fences, and Adrienne, laying her skirt over the barbed-wire on the far side, had got through without any damage either to her shapely ankles or well-cut blue serge knickers.

The country beyond was very difficult to negotiate owing to the water channels, and in spite of Adrienne's agility they made slow progress, until finally Jules decided to get back as quickly as possible on to the poplar-lined road about a quarter of a mile to their right—for they had ten miles to cover if they were to reach safety before daylight.

Travelling in this direction, they made better progress, as they were proceeding between two parallel channels, and they finally crossed the formidable canal, which lined the road, by a small bridge close to a farm-house. They went cautiously along the road towards it, Adrienne following Jules, at his request, at about one hundred yards' interval, so that he could give her warning of any danger; for they agreed her mission was the more important of the two, and that she had less chance of getting away if it came to sheer running. He was actually past the farm when the sound of heavy firing was heard in the direction from which they had come, the

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reason of which we already know. Adrienne stopped for a second, and just as she had made up her mind to make a dash past the farm, a party of Germans who formed the inlying picket of the outposts on the frontier came hurrying out, wheeling bicycles, and effectively cutting her off from Jules.

She could not get across the canals at the side, nor was there any chance of escaping from the cyclist by running back along the road; in fact, she knew that she was fairly caught. The only chance was to get behind a tree at the side, and she started to make a dart for the nearest. But she was too late, for one of the men shouted out "Halt!" and dropping his bicycle ran towards her. At the same moment she tripped over a fallen branch, and fell on her face in the grass at the side. Quick as thought she threw the packet in her pocket into the canal, but she had not time to get rid of the wireless valves before the man reached her, his rifle half raised as if he was going to shoot; and as she rolled over on her back and sat up, she looked down the barrel into the face of a ferocious-looking Hun.

"All right," she said in French—"don't look so fierce; I'm a friend. Raise your rifle, and then I can get up, for this grass is horribly wet. I want to see your Commanding Officer."

As the other men came up she got on to her feet, and in her knickers and blue coat

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and tight-fitting velvet toque, they thought at first it was a youth, until one of the men turned a torch on to her. "*Gott in Himmel!*" he exclaimed, "*ein Mädchen!*" and to her embarrassment he proceeded to examine her up and down with his torch, punctuated with what she gathered to be expressions of marked approval from the other men, who had crowded round her. Then he seized her arm, saying, "Come along! the Lieutenant will be highly pleased with such a fine prize."

"Let go my arm," said Adrienne with dignity, "and kindly allow me to put on my skirt, which is somewhere here in the grass, before we proceed any farther." The man only laughed, and one of the others picked up her skirt and put it over his arm, remarking in German, to the great amusement of the others, "I think the *Herr Oberleutnant* will prefer to see her just as she is!" Further resistance was useless, so she accepted the situation, and was conducted into the parlour of the farm, where a sleepy-looking German, with a greatcoat inadequately covering an untidy déshabille, got up out of an easy-chair in front of the fire to receive his fair prisoner, who was led in between two men. "Good heavens!" said he, "what on earth is a girl like you doing out at this time of night—and in such an extraordinary costume? Up to no good, I'll guarantee," and he grinned sardonically as he looked her up and down.

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"If Monsieur will send out these men, I will promise not to hurt him, but I will answer no questions until I get back my skirt—and I have information which will greatly interest the German authorities."

The officer issued some curt orders, and one of the men went out, returning with the skirt, which he handed rather sheepishly to Adrienne.

"We have not searched her yet, *Herr Oberleutnant*," said the *Unteroffizier* hopefully —"would you not wish us to do so?"

"No!" shouted the Lieutenant. "I will do anything that is necessary—clear out! Go up to the lines at once and find out what all the firing was about. Do you think that half a dozen men are required to escort one girl? Any excuse to avoid your duty, you lazy hounds!"

Adrienne had lost no time in donning the lost garment, and when the men had gone, said, "I am tired and wet; has Monsieur le Lieutenant any objection to my sitting down? German officers do not usually keep ladies standing—at least that is not my experience."

Her coolness rather abashed the German, and he hastily got up and indicated a chair on the other side of the hearth, which she pulled forward, and stretched out her wet feet and ankles towards the fire, whilst he regarded her with ever-increasing interest. "Well," said he, after a pause, "perhaps you will explain what you are doing here, and

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show me your permission to be within the prohibited area."

"I have no papers," she replied quietly, "for the simple reason that I have just come across the frontier; your sentries are no good at all, and I expect you will get into trouble if I tell Headquarters about it. Your arrangements are infantile, and if you are trying to prevent people who don't like Germans from leaving Belgium, I wonder that there is any one left in the country!"

She could see that this bold offensive had rather taken him aback, for he at once began to bluster, threatening all kinds of penalties if she was impertinent, at the same time stamping up and down the room.

"Gently," said Adrienne; "please do not get excited. My nerves will not stand any more noise. I do not want to get Monsieur into trouble if he is reasonable, and treats me with the courtesy and respect to which I am accustomed."

"Ha! ha!" laughed the German. "That's very good from a hussy caught roaming about the frontier at night, looking like a dancing-girl from a cabaret"; but his laugh sounded forced and nervous, and he was evidently far from sure of his ground. "What was this valuable information you talked about just now? Come, let's have it!"

"I was going to tell Monsieur, when he interrupted me, that I am an agent working for the German Army."

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"Then why in the name of Heaven did you cross the frontier *en fraude* and risk being shot, when you could have got a pass from the Germans for the asking?" said he. "That's a very likely story!"

"Well, Monsieur may believe it or not as he pleases, but I have no time to waste, as I must be getting on to Antwerp, where they are expecting me. You keep me here at your own risk. If you will lend me a bicycle I will hand it over to the German authorities there"—and, she added, smiling, "I will also do the best I can for you in regard to my getting through your sentries so easily."

The smile was a tactical error, as Adrienne soon found out, for it served to restore the German's waning confidence, and he got up and came towards her, saying, "Not quite so fast, young woman; I'm in no hurry to part with you, and shall have to know a good deal more about you before I do so. At present I find your explanations very far from satisfactory"; and then, looking at the well-shaped ankles stretched out to the fire, he continued, "I'll wager that you never came across the frontier, and I believe that you are an actress from an Antwerp or Brussels music-hall. I can make a pretty good guess what you were looking for. Anyway, he's not here, and you'll have to make the best of my society for a bit. Come now, don't be silly, but let me see what you can do in the dancing line."

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"Monsieur is quite mistaken; I am neither an actress nor a dancing-girl, but I *am* an agent of the German Intelligence, and Monsieur had better be careful, or he may land himself in trouble."

"Very well," replied he, "if you are not prepared to be friendly, I shall have to treat you as a suspect and search you. Shall I call in the men, or would you prefer me to do it unaided?" and without waiting for an answer he seized her coat and attempted to pull it off.

Adrienne, with a flaming face, and mindful of the two valves which still lay concealed in her bosom, sprang up and wrenched herself away from him, but as he again began to advance towards her, she decided that her only chance was to play a desperate card.

"I have told Monsieur the truth as far as the German authorities permit me. If I now disclose secrets which I should not do, the responsibility rests on Monsieur. I see you have a telephone there; please ring up Lörrach, and say that L. 139 has arrived from Holland, and requests that orders be given at once for her to proceed to Brussels *viâ* Antwerp."

The man hesitated, and Adrienne for a moment thought that she had carried her point, but her hopes were dashed to the ground when he replied, "Lörrach is a long way from here, and I could not get through by telephone; in any case, I do not care

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what they say, as they have no business to be sending people this way without letting us know beforehand. I don't take any orders from them; but if you like I will send a telegram, though I cannot possibly get an answer till midday to-morrow. As I can't watch you till then, I will search you now to make certain that you are not carrying anything incriminating"; and he again advanced towards her.

Adrienne quickly put the table between herself and him, but she knew that this was only a temporary respite, and in desperation drew a bow at a venture, not really hoping for any definite result. "Then ring up 'la Dame Blonde'! and touch me if you dare!" she said, and waited anxiously to see the effect.

The man pulled himself up with a jerk, and stammered out, "What do you know about her?" The girl saw that her chance shot had struck home, and with renewed courage replied, "That is my business, and I do not tell it to casual Lieutenants of *Landstürm*." Then pressing her advantage, she continued, "Tell her that L. 139 wants a bicycle placed at her disposal at once, in order that she may report to Madame at Antwerp."

He was evidently cowed, for he went to the instrument and proceeded to ring up Antwerp. A long conversation followed in German, which Adrienne could not under-

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stand, and finally he hung up the instrument and turned to Adrienne, saying sulkily, "A car will be sent to fetch you to-morrow; in the meantime I will place a room at your disposal, and you had better go to sleep. Kindly follow me"—and he led the way upstairs, and showed her into a bedroom, the door of which he locked behind her. Then she sat down to think what was the next move, for it looked as if she had jumped out of the frying-pan into the fire unless she could escape before the car came. She went to the window, but saw that there was a big drop, and that escape by it was out of the question, but she noted that a dirty pond came almost up to the walls of the house.

Regretfully she decided that the precious valves must be sacrificed, and taking them out she wrapped them in a hearthrug, and trod them into small pieces. Then she threw the metal bases into the pond, and scattered the broken glass out of the window. She now had nothing incriminating left on her except the money in her boots, which could not be extracted except by cutting off the heels, and having decided to retain it, she wedged a chair against the door, and, thoroughly exhausted, lay down on the bed to fall into a fitful slumber.

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CHAPTER XIX.

LA DAME BLONDE.

THE sun was streaming through the window when she was awakened by a hammering outside, accompanied by guttural shouts of "*Fräulein.*" On removing the chair and opening the door she found an elderly German soldier, holding a steaming cup of coffee and some black bread and meat, which he offered her, saying that the *Herr Leutnant* was asleep, and regretting that they—the men—could not offer "*Fräulein*" better fare. Adrienne was quite touched, as it was evidently an entirely spontaneous effort on the part of the soldiers, and she thanked the envoy, at the same time asking if they had heard anything of a car which was to come for her to take her to Antwerp. Perhaps she might be permitted to go down the road to meet it, and save time?

The worthy man said he would inquire, and returned shortly after with the *Unteroffizier*, who informed her that his orders were to see that she did not leave the room

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until the car came—and he emphasised the point by again locking her in.

Evidently there was no way of escaping from the journey to Antwerp, and she thought deeply of what line she should take when she got there. As regards "La Dame Blonde," it was evident, firstly, that she was a person of importance, probably the head of an espionage bureau; secondly, that the man at Rotterdam had been one of her recruiting agents; and thirdly, that apparently she was not above seducing the agents employed at Lörrach, and therefore, probably not on the best terms with the latter. It followed that she might not like to make inquiries about Adrienne from Lörrach, and that it might be possible to play off one bureau against the other. This seemed to the girl to be the only chance, and she determined to try it.

Assuming that Jules had got through safely, as was probable, the one really vital matter was to get a few hours' conversation with "le Curé." She would concentrate on obtaining that and let the consequences follow, whatever they might be. She had plenty of time to consider the question from every point of view, for the day dragged on and still no car; in fact, it was not until darkness was falling that she eventually heard it arrive, and was summoned downstairs, where a man in civilian clothes, speaking perfect French, greeted her with politeness, and

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invited her to accompany him to Antwerp. The Lieutenant was now all servility, and evidently most anxious to remove any unpleasant impression which he might have created in Adrienne's mind; but she treated him with disdain, and did not even glance at him as she got into the car. After some efforts on the part of her companion to open conversation, which were not encouraged by the girl, they continued the drive in silence, and on approaching the town he drew down the blinds, evidently to prevent her from seeing where she was being taken. Eventually they stopped, and he pulled out a thick veil from his pocket, telling her to put it over her face, and to follow him quickly. She did so, and passing down what was apparently a side street, they stopped outside a door in a garden wall, which he quickly opened with a private key, and they went through a small back garden and up some steps into a dark passage. The man produced an electric torch, and showed the way into a small room, lit a lamp, and told her to wait until he came back to fetch her.

Half an hour later she was shown into a big room upstairs, the luxurious appointments of which she hardly glanced at, for at the far end was a table with several telephones, and behind it a lady who could be no other than the mysterious "Dame Blonde."

The latter said something in German to the man, who saluted and went out, and the

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two were left alone. Adrienne looked at the woman with apprehensive interest, and saw that she was a big handsome woman with masses of corn-coloured hair, cold bright-blue eyes, and a very determined-looking mouth. She motioned Adrienne to a chair with the air of one accustomed to issuing commands. The latter felt that the handsome blonde was a far more formidable proposition than any of the Germans whom she had hitherto had to deal with, from the mere fact that she would be quite impervious to Adrienne's charms. The girl sat down, and waited for the other to commence operations.

"You claim to be a Lörrach agent, I understand, and state that your number is L. 139."

"That is so," said Adrienne; "and Madame will no doubt already have verified that my name is Valèrie de ——, and that I was repatriated from Lille two months ago?"

The woman did not answer Adrienne's query, but continued in an icy voice—

"What were your instructions, and why have you come back?"

"My task was to report on the English Army, which I did for five weeks; then the money stopped coming,"—and she explained how she had gone to the post-office until she was afraid of falling under suspicion herself.

"Why did you not return to Switzerland?"

"I tried to, but the French refused to give me a visa, and I did not know how to get

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across the frontier without it. You see, Lörrach had not put me in touch with any one else in France, although I asked them to do so before I left Germany."

"Did you get good information?"

"It is not for me to say, but if Madame will consult the 'Chief' at Lörrach I think he will assure her on that point, and that I warned him of the Messines attack."

The woman asked a good many more questions of the same description, and Adrienne answered, whenever possible, by referring her to Lörrach, which, as she noted with secret delight, evidently annoyed her interrogator considerably. The suspicion that there was no love lost between the two rival spy establishments was strengthened, as it became clearer and clearer that "La Dame Blonde" had not, and did not intend to say anything to Lörrach about the new arrival, if it could be avoided.

Finally, she came to the question of why Adrienne had come to Holland, and how she had crossed the frontier; and the girl's quick intuition, and the memory of the two men who had approached her in Rotterdam, warned her that the woman probably knew a good deal more about her movements there than she pretended. The best plan, therefore, would be to stick as closely as possible to the truth.

She explained that the English were looking for people to go back to "occupied"

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territory to work for them, and that she had invented a story about her grandmother in Lille, which seemed good enough to account for her wanting to go. Anyway, they had swallowed it, though apparently they had some suspicions, as she had been approached at Rotterdam by two men, one of whom had offered to help her over the frontier on behalf of the Allies. He probably was sent to see if she could keep her tongue, she suggested tentatively.

Watching the woman closely, Adrienne saw her look quickly down at the table, the ghost of a smile flitting across her face, and knew that she had guessed right in supposing that her interrogator knew all about the men.

"But they did not leave it at that," she continued, "for they actually sent an *agent provocateur* with an offer of help from the Germans to put me across the frontier—the cunning English pigs! But, of course, I spotted their object, and as they did not try again, I suppose they were satisfied."

The woman, with some warmth, replied, "But that was my man, and if you had accepted his help you would have been saved all the trouble of getting across the frontier, where you might easily have been shot."

"Yes," said Adrienne, "and never have been able to go back to England again without being arrested as a spy! for, of course, the English would have found out how I got across. I cannot congratulate Madame on

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her agent, for he lost his temper and made all kinds of threats on your behalf, which was so stupid that I felt more than ever convinced he was working for the English."

"Well, then, how did you get over the frontier?"

Adrienne explained more or less accurately how she had got across, substituting a hinged plank laid over the fence for the insulated frame, as she thought that the latter method might still be unknown to the Germans; but she professed to be unable to give any clear description of the people who had arranged it all, or rather her description was quite unrecognisable; and, of course, she suppressed all mention of the fact that Jules had crossed with her. To her delight, this was accepted without comment, which looked as if Jules was still at large.

She went on to describe how she had made her way at once to the main road, hoping to find a picket to which she could report, but the supervision on the frontier was so excellent that she had been stopped before she got there. (She would have liked to have said just the reverse, so as to be even with the Lieutenant, but refrained in the interests of others who might wish to follow her example.)

The woman cross-examined her closely, but naturally failed to find any flaw in the story, for it was practically true so far as she was in a position to verify it.

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Eventually Adrienne thought that the time was ripe to make the request to which she had been gradually leading up—viz., that she should at once be sent on to report to her master at Lörrach. To her intense joy the woman at first tried to avoid the question, and when pressed, put forward a number of reasons why it would be useless to send her there.

Could Adrienne get across the Swiss frontier again without being arrested? No; then what was the good of going there at all?

But could not her Lörrach friend send her back *viâ* Holland? urged Adrienne—the English would expect her to come that way.

The woman smiled in a superior manner, and brushed all Adrienne's remonstrances aside by arguing, firstly, that the English might find out she had been to Lörrach, and it was putting her to an unnecessary risk; and secondly, that the Antwerp Bureau was alone responsible for sending agents *viâ* Holland, of which arrangements Lörrach was well aware. She would arrange all that with her friend there; and Adrienne could have shouted for joy, for she shrewdly suspected that the woman intended quietly to appropriate what she believed to be one of the rival establishment's best agents, and to say nothing about it.

With great apparent reluctance Adrienne at length agreed that, if Lörrach had no objections, she would work for Antwerp,

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and the blonde lady again promised to communicate with them accordingly; but she could assure her that it would be all right.

On the assumption that Lörrach would consent, the two then discussed various details about the new mission, Adrienne insisting that she must actually go to Lille as directed by the British, and the woman assuring her that it was quite unnecessary, as she herself could answer all the questions quite well enough to satisfy the English, and would thereby save Adrienne the journey.

The latter, however, was equally firm as to the necessity for going there herself, pointing out with some justice that the English had only to confront her with a recent *repatrié* to catch her out on some point of detail about recent events in the town, which would prove she had not been there. She explained, with her tongue in her cheek, that "La Dame Blonde" would have known at once if she had attempted to lie to her, and though, of course, the English were comparatively stupid, it was no use running unnecessary risks.

The woman obviously did not like it, but eventually said that she would think it over, and meantime Adrienne must give the names of relations, so that her statements could be verified. Knowing as she did from the man who had accosted her in Holland that "La Dame Blonde" already knew about Lucille, Adrienne had to give her name. The woman

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then uttered a very serious warning. If she played false, Adrienne would surmise what was likely to happen to her sister—and she looked at Adrienne with her cold blue eyes in a manner which sent a shiver down the girl's back. At last the interview was over, for "La Dame Blonde" said, "Now you will be searched, and then you can go to bed," and she rang the bell.

A hard-faced German woman appeared, who took Adrienne to a bedroom, and there directed her to undress, herself superintending the process. Then she carefully examined her belongings, and finally departed with all her clothes, except her boots, leaving her a night-robe in exchange.

Adrienne expected she would come back for the boots in any case, so she called out, "Wait a minute! you have forgotten my boots; don't you want to look at them?" on which they, too, were removed—but the girl felt confident that they would resist any examination short of actual destruction, and she was right.

Three days later, armed with all the necessary passes, she left Antwerp by train for Lille, where she immediately proceeded to the *Kommandantur*, as ordered, and reported her arrival. Then she went to the big house, to receive a rapturous welcome from the astonished Léonie, who not being altogether in the know, had never expected to see her again. Adrienne's first question was about

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Valèrie, and her heart sank when the faithful retainer, with tears in her eyes, replied, "Very, very ill; the doctor says there is no hope, and that my poor mistress may pass away at any moment; if you have any messages from her mother, there is no time to be lost."

Adrienne suspected that she herself was under close observation, but she had foreseen this possibility, and had mentioned to "La Dame Blonde" that it would look very suspicious if she did not visit the convent to see "Sister Marie," who had nursed her during the severe illness, as the result of which she had been repatriated, and that lady had quite agreed.

She therefore lost no time in starting off, and as she left the house she noticed that a man, who had been idling about, turned and followed her at a distance. She rang the bell outside the great door, and a face peered at her through the grating; then the door was swung open, and a sister greeted her with evident surprise and pleasure.

When she arrived by the bedside she was shocked to observe the change in Valèrie, who was lying in a state of semi-consciousness, but the poor girl recognised her friend at once, and made a great effort to welcome her. The nurse begged her patient to be calm, and Adrienne gave her the messages which she had brought from her mother. She tried to fence with Valèrie's requests for news of

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her brothers, but she would not be put off, and Adrienne at last broke to her the sad news that her soldier brother had been very severely wounded in Champagne. The poor girl gasped, and then whispered, "Did you bring the wireless apparatus?" Adrienne, seeing the anxiety on her face lest her sacrifice should have been in vain, stretched a point and replied, "Yes, dear Valèrie; thanks to you, everything is here, and all is well. France will not forget."

When "le Curé" arrived shortly afterwards he found Adrienne and the nurse crying softly by the bedside of the dead.

"This is no time for crying, my child," said he gently, placing his hand on Adrienne's head. "Our dear sister is at peace, and for us who remain there is work to be done. Jules arrived yesterday with the equipment, and told us how you had been captured; he also said you had weighty matters of which to tell me. We must not let our sorrows interfere with our duties."

"Forgive me, father," replied Adrienne, regaining her self-control; "but I fear that the joy of seeing me again, and the news which I brought, hastened her end—and I had hoped that it would have been so different! But you are right; there is no time to lose, for I have to return to Antwerp to-morrow, and I have much to tell you. If only I could have stayed myself to see the matter through!"

Then an idea struck her. Surely the hand

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of Providence had timed her arrival at the very moment of Valèrie's death, in order that the poor girl might regain her own identity, and be put to rest in a manner befitting her unselfish life. The way seemed so clearly indicated that she wondered that it had not occurred to her before.

"Father, from this moment I must again become Sister Marie. Send some one to warn Léonie, and then inform the *Kommandantur* that Valèrie de ——, just returned from England, has unexpectedly been attacked by her old malady, and has died suddenly from heart failure. Here are my papers to show them, and every one in Lille will vouch for it that the corpse is that of the real Valèrie. Unless they send some one from Antwerp or Lörrach who knows me well, the Germans cannot possibly find out what has actually happened, provided the doctor is loyal to us, and we surely can trust him."

She spoke in the *exalté* manner of one inspired, and in view of her confidence a decision was soon taken. "Le Curé" himself went into the road, and hailed the first man he saw, who naturally was the watcher, and asked him to go at once to the *Kommandantur* to inform the authorities that a visitor had died suddenly. The man was evidently loath to go, but when he heard the name and was shown her passes, he wasted no further time but set off as hard as he could go, taking the papers with him.

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Meantime, within the convent the corpse was being rapidly dressed in Adrienne's clothes, and removed to one of the reception rooms, whilst the doctor and Léonie, who had been summoned, were duly primed as to what they were to say.

When the German officials arrived an hour later, they found the faithful servant kneeling beside the body of her dead mistress, weeping with an abandonment of grief too deep to be simulated, and the evidence which they laboriously wrote down as to the sudden seizure and heart failure, following on the long and trying journey, was so conclusive as to admit of no doubt. In suitable terms they expressed their regret, but directed that the funeral should not take place until permission was given. Then they went away, and drew up an elaborate report, which duly reached "La Dame Blonde" the following evening.

Perhaps she ought to have sent one of her jackals to view the body, but she did not do so, for she was on rather delicate ground in the matter. She had no objection to suborning an agent from another Service, provided that there was no chance of being found out. But now that the girl was dead, the less interest she appeared to take in her the better, and in her reply to Lille she made it quite clear that, so far as she was concerned, they could bury her at once—and she did not mention Lörrach.

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Unfortunately, as an afterthought and some days later, it occurred to her that she might cover up her shady actions more artistically and at the same time acquire merit, so she wrote a full account of Adrienne's arrival to the gentleman at Lörrach, stating that she had given her permission to stop a few days at Lille to see her people, pending the receipt of orders from him. If he would communicate his instructions to the *Kommandantur* there, they would be delivered to her. She herself was very glad to have been able to help her brother-in-arms, though in future it would be safer to let her know beforehand when he proposed to send people into her area; he could rely on her, &c.—all of which the recipient no doubt appreciated at its proper value; but he took early steps to get into touch with the brightest jewel in his collection, the charming and invaluable L. 139.

Being, however, a man who prided himself on his knowledge of French psychology, he decided to give the lady in the case a pleasant surprise, his line of argument being that she had been away amongst her own people for some time, and might well have formed a new attachment. It would obviously be wise to give her a short refresher course of her old German lover, so as to renew her enthusiasm for the cause of the Fatherland. Needless to say, he had never seen the individual in question!

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The result of his endeavours was that the "Town Major," in the squalid village to which he had been relegated in disgrace, one morning received an official envelope, informing him that he was granted ten days' leave to proceed to Lille to meet a lady named Valèrie de ——, who was waiting for him there. His expenses would be paid by the German Intelligence through the *Kommandantur*, where further instructions were awaiting him.

The elderly *roué* was tickled to death at the idea of the German Staff arranging a rendezvous for him, and in his comments on the subject, he can claim to have forestalled our most successful recruiting poster—"See the world, and get paid for doing it." He congratulated himself on not having denied the acquaintance of the fair unknown, when he had been taxed with it on a previous occasion; and the fact that he had not the faintest idea who the lady was, did not in the least disturb him. It merely confirmed his own opinion that he was irresistible to the fair sex—with a few annoying exceptions such as that insolent minx at "X" (meaning Adrienne); curse her!

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CHAPTER XX.

ADRIENNE GIVES THE SIGNAL AND RECEIVES AN ANSWER.

ADRIENNE, or "Sister Marie" as she was now called, lost no time in explaining to "le Curé" the nature of the Allied plans, and the part which the patriots were expected to play in the next great offensive; for she had made the condition before starting, that the old priest should be told sufficient to enable him to carry on, should anything happen to herself.

The first thing to be done was to rig up the wireless receiving set, and she was able to explain that, with the improved form of valve which Jules had brought, it would be quite unnecessary to run the risk of erecting it in the Church Tower, but that the aerial could be concealed round the inside of an attic in the convent itself, which would very much simplify the whole affair. A new condenser had been manufactured by the local expert, and on the following evening they

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were in a position to receive the British communiqué.

They took it down, waiting anxiously for the final groups, which were to contain the key; and to Adrienne's satisfaction, instead of the usual "ends," it read "completion," which, as she had informed "le Curé," would mean, "if you have arrived put out the signal to-morrow."

"Le Curé" had, of course, full confidence in Adrienne's story, apart from the fact that British 'planes had been observed over Lille on the two preceding days; but it was a great satisfaction to the girl to receive confirmation, and they all went to rest in a state of pleasurable excitement.

As a matter of interest, it is now known that the enemy communicated with the Sinn Feiners prior to Casement's landing in Ireland by almost identical methods, which shows how similar difficulties inevitably lead to the adoption of similar solutions.

Early next morning the sisters might have been seen in the high-walled close behind the convent, busily engaged in carrying large armfuls of washing, with the ostensible object of putting it out to dry. Six sheets were first spread out in one line on the grass, which meant that Adrienne had arrived; then another row of sheets was laid roughly parallel to the first, which indicated that the "luggage" was also safe; and, finally, a third row to show that the patriots intended

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to carry out the instructions which Adrienne had brought.

Then the sisters in relays watched from an upper casement window for the coming of the aeroplane, and Adrienne sat beside each in turn until the shadows began to lengthen in the warn autumn evening; and then at last, when the sun was almost down, they heard a faint drone, and gradually their straining eyes picked up a tiny speck in the sky coming out of the setting sun. The two girls clasped hands, and in her excitement Adrienne's grip almost made the other scream with pain. Soon the 'plane was practically over their heads, but at what seemed to them to be a great height, and they watched it anxiously as it began to swing slowly round in great wide circles, coming ever lower. At the same time the girls seemed to hear other droning, of which, however, Adrienne took no particular notice, her attention being concentrated on the 'plane above them, which, as they could now see, was painted with rings, and therefore was not German. Lower it came, and suddenly a brilliant magnesium star floated down—the pilot had seen the signal. And then a curious thing happened, for instead of turning straight home as she had expected, he commenced what seemed to her to be the most extraordinary manœuvres, but which actually were a series of two or three loops. The people in the streets stopped in astonishment to look at the performance

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of this *fou Anglais*, stunting right over a stronghold of the enemy; more particularly as three German 'planes were approaching, which were hidden from Adrienne by the roof of the house, and which apparently the bold intruder had not yet seen.

Suddenly her face was wreathed in smiles. Surely it could not be!—but who else could it be? And her heart answered that it must be the one pilot in the world, trying to show her how delighted he was that she was safe. Oh! why didn't he get away quickly? For at this moment two other 'planes came into her line of vision, flying at a great pace westwards, and evidently trying to cut him off from home. Presumably the British pilot had also at last seen them, for he commenced to make a bee-line towards the setting sun; but to the anxious watcher it was obvious that he was too late, for the two German machines were rapidly converging on him, whilst farther back and on the far side a third came into view. A few minutes, which seemed like years, elapsed, and then the two leading Germans appeared to be just above their quarry, and one suddenly dived down on it. As a pigeon flashes in the sunlight, so the setting sun lit up the wings of one of the 'planes as it seemed to turn over, and the girl's heart stood still; then a machine dropped like a meteor, bursting into flames, and leaving a trail of smoke hanging behind it in the still air, whilst shortly after the faint

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crackle of machine-guns reached her ears. A terrified "Oh" escaped her lips. Then, frozen with horror, she buried her face in her hands, unable to bear the sight, and shuddering as she pictured the machine striking the ground. With a great effort she regained her self-control and forced herself to look again. Why did not the enemy turn back? And hope again sprang up in her breast, for all the three remaining machines were still fading rapidly into the distance, and another faint burst of firing reached her, any final doubts being removed by the sound of cheering from the street outside and shouts of "*Vive les Anglais!*"

An hour later a solitary German machine passed eastwards over the town in the twilight, and the result of the battle was eagerly discussed in many a home that night.

To enlighten the reader in these happenings, it is necessary to return to the day after Archer and Adrienne had said good-bye, at the entrance to Folkestone Pier Station.

The morning broke fine and clear, and Archer had taken a 'plane across the Channel early, to be informed on arrival at Marquise that he had been posted to an Army Squadron, and was to return and bring his kit over next day. This was grand news, and he walked on air as he stepped on board the steamer, for at last his frequent requests for more active employment on the front had been granted.

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Followed an interview with "le Commandant" at Headquarters, at which the latter showed him a town-plan of Lille, and explained that he was to look for washing, laid out in a garden, which latter he indicated on the plan. As to the time of the reconnaissance, his squadron commander would decide that, as also any arrangements for an escort. If he saw the signal, he was to note how many lines there were, and then drop a flare and come straight back.

This was quite a clear, straightforward proposition, and though Archer imagined that there might be considerable opposition on the part of the enemy, he did not say so, for it was not his business.

He rather wondered why he had been selected, and eventually summoned up courage to ask "le Commandant" whether by any chance it was in connection with a certain young lady with whom they were both acquainted. That officer, noting his blushes, remarked kindly—

"Well, as a matter of fact, it is. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, well, you know, sir, she helped me to escape when I got landed on the other side, so naturally she is a great friend of mine," he replied; and he was just going to say what she had told him on the boat about her mission, when he remembered that he had promised not to repeat it to any one, and he checked himself, merely adding:

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"And I hope you have good news of her. Is she by any chance in Lille?"

"Le Commandant" smiled, and said: "That's just what you are going to find out, my boy, for it is she who is going to put out the signal."

The first two reconnaissances, made in the middle of the day, saw no sign of the signal, though they resulted in some fairly stiff fighting with the enemy, and Archer was much downcast, for it looked as if his worst fears had been realised. The squadron also got somewhat knocked about, and it was thought better to send a single fast machine later in the evening, which might escape notice on the outward journey, and return after sunset, when the enemy did not care about pursuing too close to the front lines.

We already know a part of the sequel, and the rest may be gathered from the verbal report which Archer made that evening when he landed.

"I got over Lille about 19.10 at 7000 feet, but had difficulty in picking out objects on the ground owing to the shadows. I came down to 4000 feet and circled about, and at last I made out three lines of washing, about six pieces in each line. Then I started back, but was attacked by three Huns. One dived on to my tail, but I zoumed and he shot past me. Before he could turn I gave him a drum, and he went down out of control. I did not actually see him hit the ground,

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as the second Hun was closing on me. He tried the same game, but I managed to avoid him, though I got a snick in one ear"—and he pointed to a mass of clotted blood,—"nothing serious. I did not follow him down, as I was rather low already, and did not want to give the 'Archies' a sitter later on—besides, I thought I ought to push on for home with the good news. However, he came at me again from below, but I looped and got on his tail, and he went down with one wing off. The third fellow was still following, and as my engine began to conk a bit, I thought I'd better have a smack at him, but, directly I turned, the blighter made off home."

"Probably just as well for you!" said the Squadron Commander, smiling; "and did you have any trouble crossing the lines?"

"Oh, I got shot up a bit after the Huns left me, but no damage except a hole through my trousers, though I am afraid the new S.E. is rather knocked about."

"All right," said the Squadron Commander, "I'll see about that. Now you'd better go off to hospital and have your ear seen to, whilst I ring up Headquarters."

"I'm not going near any hospital, sir," replied Archer; "they will fill me up with their anti-tetanus filth and lay me up for a month. I'm quite O.K."

"As you like," said the other,—"then I shall report you 'wounded, at duty.'"

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"Is that necessary, sir? No good alarming my people for nothing—they don't know I'm back at the front yet, you see," he added rather shyly.

"What I report is my business, young fellow; and I should think you'd better tell your people anyway—they are sure to find out. You've earned a wound stripe, and you've got to have it. Good youngster that," muttered the Squadron Commander to himself after Archer had gone; "can't think why they kept him so long at Lymphe—looks like a budding 'Ball.'"

Unfortunately there are always many buds, but few reach maturity.

To return once more to our friends in Lille—the ensuing days were busy ones for the patriots, for there were many arrangements to make, and but few days in which to do it, since the end of July was fast approaching; and though Adrienne could give no dates, the difficult and dangerous enterprise, of which she was the directing brain, might be expected to take place about the beginning of August. It will simplify matters if the nature of the enterprise is explained at this stage, though it must not be supposed that Adrienne knew or imparted all that follows to her confederates in Lille.

The experience of many battles had shown that an initial success could always be counted upon by the attacking side, owing to the factor of surprise, but that the extent to

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which that success could be developed depended entirely on the rapidity with which the Allies could push their reinforcements through across the area shattered in the initial attack, as compared with the rate of arrival of the enemy's reserves. It was a perfectly simple mathematical problem, in which the advantage must always rest with the enemy, since his communications radiated from the centre of the circle, whilst those of the Allies ran round the circumference. By keeping his reserves in a central position he had merely to move them down one of the radii to the threatened point, using numerous and intact railways, whilst the Allies had either to effect a great concentration beforehand and risk losing the factor of surprise, or else to run the alternative risk of arriving too late. In either case there remained for them the stupendous task of crossing the shattered battle zone.

On previous occasions the Allied aeroplanes had done their best to delay the arrival of the enemy's reserves; but though stations and even occasional trains had been damaged and the enemy thoroughly frightened, the aeroplane had not been invented which could be certain of blowing up a railway bridge or of effecting any damage to the permanent way which could not be repaired in twenty-four hours by a highly-organised and efficient engineer service, such as that possessed by the Germans.

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It was therefore well worth while to attempt to supplement attack from the air by sabotage on the ground, and for this purpose the Allies had been smuggling explosives into Holland and across the frontier for a long time by methods which do not affect this story. Unfortunately—a fact of which Adrienne's friend in Rotterdam was not aware when he criticised the Belgian arrangements—some of the stuff had been captured, including a large proportion of the detonators and fuzes, and it was to supply the deficiency in these latter that she had brought over a small quantity in the old suit-case, half of which now reposed at the bottom of the canal near the frontier, whilst the remainder was believed to be safe at Courtrai.

Obviously the success of the whole scheme depended on the timing of the demolitions. If premature, the damage would be repaired and the enemy put on his guard; whilst, if left till too late, the intense activity on the lines in question would prevent their being carried out at all.

The great difficulty was to make satisfactory arrangements in advance which would not disclose to the enemy the date and front of attack, should one of the agents be captured.

Adrienne and her wireless set were the solution adopted, and it was she who bore on her young shoulders the great responsibility for giving the final word to put the scheme into operation, so far as the British

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portion was concerned; though she was only directly concerned in the arrangements for destroying one particular bridge, which Jean was actually to carry out, and which was the nearest to the battle front.

It was, however, necessary for her to get into touch with the other parties, so that she could be certain of giving them the word when the time came for action; and without disclosing the full reason, she lost no time in doing so.

But as regards her own particular bridge, she met with an entirely unexpected obstacle at the very start. Jean reported it as being guarded, but they had expected this, and were not discouraged thereby. But what did knock the bottom out of the whole scheme was that the explosives and detonators, which they had believed to be safe in Courtrai, had been captured by the enemy. Fortunately, the Germans had not got any information with their haul, beyond the general indication that sabotage somewhere in the neighbourhood might be contemplated; but as they had already captured some Belgians near the frontier with a similar cargo, there was nothing much in that, for the Belgians were always trying these tricks, but usually talked so much about their schemes beforehand that little came of them. The enemy merely, therefore, placed additional guards on the two main railway bridges over the Lys and the Bossuyt Canal.

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Adrienne questioned Jean very closely about their objective, and in the light of their previous experiences they both agreed that an aeroplane could land, provided the necessary guiding lights could be arranged. If Jules went back at once to Holland, there might be time to cable over and get a reply by wireless as to whether their scheme—which will appear later—should be adopted, or whether there was time to send the necessary explosives across the frontier from England; always assuming that this could still be done, which Adrienne thought was by no means certain, otherwise why had she been employed as a carrier? Jules was summoned, and after careful consideration, Adrienne decided to send him to the address to which she had been told to apply in the last resort, and which, from the fact that it was known to the Germans, she judged to be that of the Chief British Intelligence Officer in Holland.

The two alternatives were sufficiently explained to their messenger to enable him to make them clear at the other end, and he started off that evening, arriving safely in Holland four days later—for he was an old hand at the game.

Meanwhile our friends anxiously watched the nightly communiqué for news that their message had got through, and their delight may be imagined when, seven days later, some apparently meaningless letters appeared at the end of the message, which, on being

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deciphered by Adrienne, produced the two words, "Second. Midnight."

This indicated that the second alternative —viz., Adrienne's plan—was approved, and that it was to be carried out at midnight, and they made their preparations accordingly.

Jean, disguised as an old man, spent most of his time during the ensuing days with a friend on the railways, who was on duty at a level-crossing near the bridge, watching the routine of the German soldiers engaged in guarding his objective.

The time for action was approaching, and Adrienne had her messengers ready in the neighbourhood, when one night strange letters again appeared at the end of the communiqué, which proved to mean, "Forty-four, forty-five."

The numbers were not sent in French, so as to avoid giving any clue to the locality of the person for whom they were intended; but in the convent there were people sufficiently well educated to supply any deficiencies on Adrienne's part in the knowledge of English.

The latter mentally deducted the key number 39, known only to herself, and arrived at the correct date—viz., four nights ahead. This was confirmed on the following evening, when the groups for "Forty-three, forty-four," came through. She had already calculated how long it would take the various *courriers* to reach their destinations; and as

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the time arrived, she summoned each and sent him off with orders to carry out the demolition as soon as possible after arrival, thus avoiding giving any specific date.

Jean, who had not so far to go, was standing by with a trusty Belgian, who had a reliable friend in Courtrai whom they would collect *en route.*

Adrienne, though she intended to do so, was never fated to accompany them, for her course was nearly run.

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CHAPTER XXI.

THE TOWN MAJOR HAS HIS REVENGE.

We left the Town Major packing up his kit for ten days' holiday at Lille, where he was to meet a certain unknown, but doubtless charming lady, who had been smitten by his manly attractions. The other officers were not sorry to see his back, for he was an offensive brute even to his own comrades, and his remarks about his coming adventure offended even their inadequately developed susceptibilities. What made it even more annoying was that they had unanimously refused to believe his statements, until he had confounded them all by producing the official letter, and his triumph was almost unbearable.

The junior officers secretly prayed that the whole thing might prove to be a hoax; but they had little hope, since the German Army did not permit itself such relaxation in war-time, and the Intelligence in particular were highly serious and self-important.

Arrived at Lille, the Town Major made his

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way to the *Kommandantur*, to ascertain the whereabouts of the lady, and to get his further instructions; also, and not the least important, to receive the promised advance of funds to cover his expenses in entertaining the fair charmer, which was really the cream of the joke from his point of view.

He swaggered into the office, clicked his heels, and announced himself, followed by, "Where's the lady who is pining for me?" Then he brought out the witticism which he had never ceased repeating since some one had foolishly laughed at it: "Cuddle the girls, and get paid for doing it—that's something like soldiering, ha, ha, ha!"

To his surprise, the joke seemed to fall entirely flat; but he laughed all the louder himself to make up, when the officer at the table said coldly, "Valèrie de —— was buried ten days ago, and my orders are to direct you to return forthwith to your post."

For a moment the Town Major seemed to shrink like a punctured toad; then his face became purple, and he burst out into a stream of oaths.

The officer begged him to keep calm, at the same time trying to express his regret for the disappointment; but as he was junior to the Town Major, the latter saw no reason to do anything of the kind

"Those young swine were right, and I have been had," he shouted; "you will find out that I am not the sort of man to play

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tricks on," and much more of the same kind, despite the officer's attempts to explain that the original orders had not been issued by his office, though he had no reason to suppose they were not perfectly genuine.

For a long time he could not succeed in checking the torrent of eloquence; but when at last he succeeded in getting in a word, he produced his letter of instructions. The Town Major brushed it aside, saying: "Oh yes, I know all about those kind of letters; I've had one! What I want to know is, who is the d——d fool who writes them? Tell me that! I don't believe there ever was such a woman, and if there was, I don't believe she is dead. Prove it!"

The officer saw his chance of stopping the flow of invective, and said quietly: "That is quite easy, and if you will accompany me, I will entirely satisfy you on the point;" with which he got up and led the way towards the door.

The Town Major unwillingly followed, but he spluttered at intervals as they went along the road leading towards the convent, when he thought what a fool he would look on his return to his village in the mud, and wondered how on earth he could cover up his discomfiture. The more he thought about it the more vindictive he felt, and it was in this frame of mind that he arrived at the convent gate, through which Adrienne had entered less than a fortnight previously.

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The officer rang the bell, and, as before, a face appeared at the grating, and the officer observing it, peremptorily ordered the gate to be opened, which the terrified sister, who had seen the German uniform, immediately did.

"I wish to see the Mother Superior at once. No! don't run away, but take us straight to her, for we have no time to waste;" and, indeed, he was thoroughly sick of the whole business, and more especially of his unpleasant companion, and wanted to get quit of him at the first opportunity.

As they followed the trembling sister up the stairs and reached the first landing, a door opened and another sister came out. For one fatal moment she glanced at them, then retired hastily and shut the door. But the Town Major, who never forgot a pretty face, had looked into her eyes, and it was enough to awake memories, though for the moment the sister's headgear puzzled him, and he could not quite place her.

They found the Mother Superior, and the officer asked her to relate the circumstances of Valèrie's death. The old lady was naturally upset and anxious at this sudden revival of a question which they all had hoped was finally settled; but she bravely repeated the well-worn romance for which a good many devout Christians had already begged absolution. Then the officer turned and said sarcastically to the Town Major, "Now are you satisfied? Because, if so, I want to get back

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to my office. I have no time to waste on this tomfoolery."

The Town Major was thinking deeply—always a painful process for him—and appeared to have lost interest in the subject, for he replied by saying, "Very well, but there is another girl whom I should like to see;" and then he suddenly remembered, and he added, "Yes, a girl from 'X.' I'll warrant she's up to no good, and I should like to know how she got here."

"Very well," said the officer; and to the Mother Superior he added, "Please call all the sisters, and we will have a look at them," for he was not at all averse to inspecting the collection himself. The old lady protested that it was the hour for devotions, and that it would greatly alarm her poor children; but the Town Major insisted, and eventually the sisters trooped in and lined up, and the two inspected them with interest. "The one I mean is not here," said the Town Major finally; "show me the list of inmates!" and when it was produced, he counted them up and found there was one missing.

There was a painful silence, and then the Mother Superior, seeing she was cornered, said, "That must be Sister Marie; but she is ill, and must not be disturbed."

"Oh no, she's not!" said the Town Major in his most offensive manner, "for I saw her only ten minutes ago, and she looked as blooming as a rose." Then to the officer:

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"I can tell you she's a perfect peach, but as artful as the devil. I know for a fact that she deserted from a labour gang, and I'll bet she is up to no good here. Bad lot some of these sisters, they tell me," and his bold eyes looked up and down the line of gentle faces before him; but fortunately the sisters did not entirely understand what he said, though there was no mistaking his look. "Come, Mother, trot her out, or we'll search the place ourselves."

The old lady, mindful of the wireless set in the attic, saw there was no help for it, so she sent a sister to fetch the truant; and Adrienne shortly entered the room, her eyes modestly on the ground, hoping against hope that she might still escape recognition. The Town Major stepped up to her and raised her chin, then he pulled off her hood, and her pretty brown hair fell in curling clusters on her shoulders. "Ha, ha! you sly minx," he said; "this is a nice get-up for a fly-by-night like you. There are quite a number of people looking for you, my little beauty, and my trip to Lille has not been wasted after all. Ha, ha, ha!" Then to the officer, who had been watching the scene with astonishment not unmixed with resentment, he said: "You'd better take her right away and lock her up, or she'll vanish again. She's a regular spitfire, and as clever as a monkey —but she made a mistake when she thought she could get the better of me."

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"Monsieur's friend seems quite certain that I am a criminal," said Adrienne bravely to the other officer; "but it might be well perhaps if he would prefer a definite accusation, other than the fact that he appears to dislike me. Monsieur will understand that there might be reasons for that which would not be entirely to my discredit. I have been here for a long time with the permission of the German authorities, including yourself, and my registration papers can be inspected to prove it."

The officer was as favourably impressed by the girl's charming appearance and her frank statement as he was disgusted by the obvious animus displayed by the Town Major towards her, and he could quite believe the girl's explanation of his compatriot's venom, and after half an hour's personal experience of his society was able to sympathise with her point of view. He inspected her papers, and, to the rage of the Town Major, absolutely declined to arrest her out of hand; and though that vindictive official tried to adopt the attitude of the superior officer, he resolutely maintained his position.

The sisters were entitled to some consideration, and, as he pointed out, the girl could not get away—or rather, if she did do so after his warning, the whole of the rest of the inmates of the convent would be liable to arrest. He would accept all responsibility if she would give her parole; and, in the

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circumstances, Adrienne had no option but to do so.

Eventually the two left, each thoroughly exasperated with the other, the officer thinking that it was purely a case of personal revenge on the part of the Town Major, and the latter equally convinced that the officer was an obstinate fool to run any risk of losing a dangerous character like Adrienne once he had got his hand on her.

In this frame of mind they proceeded to the *Kommandantur*, where the Town Major made a full statement of all he knew up to the time when she had left the village of "X," stoutly asserting that he had reason to believe she had subsequently deserted from the gang to which he had sent her. As the local officials pointed out, that could be verified in due course; and he had to leave it at that, for no one saw any reason to fall in with his suggestion that he should prolong his stay in Lille pending the result of the inquiry, which, with a little artistic embroidery, might have saved his face on his return to his own station.

As it was, he had to leave Lille next morning to return to his post, where he was received with overt jeers by all who ventured to do so, and covert smiles by others who would have liked to follow suit. If ridicule could have killed anything so pachydermatous, he would not long have survived; for they all firmly believed that his leg had been

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thoroughy well pulled, and did not conceal their delight at the fact.

In the convent a painful scene followed the departure of the two Germans, the sisters wringing their hands, and asking each other what on earth they could do to save Adrienne. Only the Mother Superior and Adrienne herself remained calm, the latter pointing out that the first thing to do was to warn Jean and his party not to come near the place, as it might be watched, and to summon "le Curé" to come at once, so that he could take over charge of the operations, seeing that she might be removed at any moment.

When the old priest arrived they told him the whole story, and he was naturally as much puzzled as any one else as to why the Town Major, who was not stationed at Lille, should suddenly have appeared in order to make inquiries about Valèrie, whom he could never have seen.

Then suddenly the truth dawned on Adrienne, and she told them how she had been asked at Lörrach for the name of her imaginary German lover, and how, on the spur of the moment, she had given that of the Town Major. That explained the whole thing, for, of course, he had been sent by Lörrach to identify the body, though why he had arrived so late on the scene was not clear. That was a bit of luck anyway. But how had he known that Adrienne was in the convent, inquired

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the priest, and did he connect her in any way with Valèrie ?

When she explained how she had met him in the passage by the merest chance, the old man with difficulty refrained from saying what he thought about the sister who had admitted the visitors without first warning the inmates—a thought which had been in the minds of all, but which, to their credit, no one ever put into words.

The poor girl herself was in the deepest grief, for she was only too well aware that she was the cause of trouble, the end of which no one could foresee.

Adrienne, perhaps because she was the one most immediately affected, appeared the least concerned. She endeavoured to allay their fears by pointing out that the Town Major had nothing definite against her, barring the fact that she had deserted from the labour gang, and that was not a capital offence.

But how, they asked, would she explain the fact that she had got into the convent, and the manner in which papers had been procured for her, without putting the rope round her own neck, and implicating a series of people who had helped her, including " le Curé " ? What about the German car which she and Jean had held up and the men they had turned adrift in the snow ? Supposing one of them identified her ?

" As regards how I got here," replied the

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girl, "I shall refuse to say anything at all, and they cannot make me."

Unfortunately, she did not know the story of her elopement with the German captain in charge of the gang, by which Jaspar had so fortuitously covered her disappearance, and which, since the officer in question had been killed, might have been difficult to disprove.

"Well, then," some one continued, "you will have to say what happened after you reached Lille, and how you got in here. That will require a good deal of explanation!"

"I think," said "le Curé," who began to see daylight, "that we may invoke the assistance of our dear sister, Valèrie, who is beyond the reach of German reprisals. We could say that Adrienne went to her house, and as she required a nurse, it would be quite natural that Valèrie, who knew nothing about her visitor beyond the fact that she was thoroughly competent, should break the regulations in order to obtain papers for her."

"But that will inculpate poor Léonie," protested Adrienne, "and you too."

"As regards Léonie, that may be true," replied "le Curé," "but not nearly so seriously as if the real facts come out. We will, of course, obtain her consent, and she will gladly agree, for it may save all those here present. I shall be suspected in any case, but the Germans will not dare to touch me

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for such a trifling offence, which, I can explain, was carried out in all innocence of heart on Valèrie's representations. In any case, I am an old man, and my work is nearly finished. If we do not give some plausible explanation, they will never rest until they have dragged out the whole facts, which will mean certain death for our dear Adrienne, and imprisonment for many others. Come, my children, have confidence; let us put our trust in the divine mercy of our Holy Father;" and the old man fell on his knees, followed by the weeping sisters, and offered up prayers that a blessing might be granted to their feeble efforts.

That evening the last groups of the communiqué spelt out "Forty-two, forty-three," and Jean's party left, for the time had come. That night also the wireless instrument was dismantled and buried in the quiet close behind the convent, there to remain until the danger should be overpast. It had done its work for the time being.

Two mornings later the police arrived at the convent gate to take Adrienne away, though they declined to state the charge against her. She said good-bye to the sorrowing sisters with outward calm, for now that her mission was completed, she was prepared to face the worst; and she passed through the prison doors with a firm step. Fortunately, we cannot look into the future, or the bravest would often be dismayed, and Adrienne might well have trembled had she known the full

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anguish of the succeeding weeks, of which the following sketch is an altogether inadequate description.

The cell, in which she was placed in solitary confinement, was small and bare, and the high grated window let in no glimpse of the outer world; nor was she permitted to see any visitors, whilst the one hour's exercise in the high-walled courtyard was all too little for a high-spirited and active girl such as Adrienne. Otherwise her gaolers were not unkind to her at first.

She wondered why she was not interrogated, but the fact was that the case rather puzzled the German police, and they were busy following up the tracks of the "Hauptmann" with whom she was supposed to have eloped, until they were defeated by finding that he was dead.

At last Adrienne was brought out of her cell and taken before an official of the German Security Police, whom we will call "the Inspector"—a dark-faced, sinister-looking individual, who immediately began to browbeat his fair prisoner.

"Do you deny that you were sent to the labour gang at Dury under suspicion of treason?"

"I do not deny that I was sent to the gang, but certainly not for treason—unless, of course, Monsieur considers the refusal of unwelcome attentions from a German officer comes under that heading."

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"I do not believe that attentions from any one would be unwelcome to you," sneered the Inspector, hoping to make her lose her temper, and mindful of the entirely untrue story of her easy conquest by the "Hauptmann." "That won't hold water. I warn you that it will be best to speak the truth, for we have ways of extracting it which you will not like!"

"Monsieur has not seen the gentleman in question," replied the girl; "but if he will ask the officer who came to the Convent, I think he will believe my statement, whatever his opinion of my moral character may be."

The Inspector scowled, for he had already heard that officer's opinion of the Town Major, which was the reverse of complimentary, so he tried a new tack.

"You were not so particular about Hauptmann Schmidt, eh? But perhaps he was better looking?"

Adrienne wondered who on earth this could be, and to what occasion he was referring; but she merely kept silence, suspecting a trap, and so missed a good cue; and the man went on—

"What did you do between the time you left the gang and your arrival in Lille, and how did you get here?"

"I cannot answer," she replied firmly.

"Gott in Himmel!" he exclaimed; "what do you mean by 'you cannot answer'? Do

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you mean that you refuse to account for your movements ?"

"If Monsieur chooses to put it that way, it is not for me to contradict him."

"You impudent slut!" he shouted; "you dare to defy me! You will sing a different tune presently." Then, controlling himself, he added, "However, that can wait for the moment; meantime, what were you doing at the Convent with false papers, and who got them for you ?"

Adrienne had decided in her own mind to answer no questions on this subject either, leaving it entirely to "le Curé" to explain the matter in the way which they had arranged between them; there would thus be less danger of their contradicting each other on points of detail, which is where false evidence generally breaks down. She therefore replied: "That is not my affair, and I regret that I am unable to give Monsieur any information on the subject."

The man stormed and threatened, but was unable to extract any different reply; and at length, seeing that he was getting no further, but more than ever convinced that she was a dangerous suspect, he sent her back to her cell, remarking, "We shall meet again, and you will then sing a very different tune." But remembering the steady look in the dark-blue eyes under the curling black lashes, he felt in his heart of hearts very far from confident about it.

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The Germans lost no time in putting into effect their coercive measures, which, in the first instance, took the form of giving her only the absolute minimum of food necessary to support life, stopping all exercise, and bursting into her cell at all hours of the day and night to prevent her sleeping and generally shatter her nerve.

At the end of ten days of this she was so weak that she had to be supported by two men when she was next taken to be interrogated. She still gave the same answers, though her escort squeezed the arms which they were holding until she almost fainted; but eventually the inquisitors were compelled to acknowledge defeat, and the poor girl was led back to her cell.

From her point of view the interview was by no means unsatisfactory, in so far as it showed that they had got no fresh evidence, and did not supect that, as Valèrie, she had posed as a German agent both at Lörrach and Antwerp. Her interrogator was, in fact, both puzzled and annoyed, for it is extremely hard to build up a case against a person who will say nothing, and the hopes which he had entertained of making a sensational coup and acquiring much personal credit did not appear to be getting any nearer fulfilment.

He had no intention, however, of letting any one else into this apparently good thing, which was fortunate for the prisoner, as if

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either Antwerp or Lörrach had actually been called in to view her, the game would have been up at once.

He decided to try and manufacture some fresh evidence which would provide the basis for a capital charge; and it was suggested to her that, as in all probability she would shortly be shot, she might like to write to her friends in Holland. She declined the offer, however, on the ground that she had no friends there, so the official himself wrote in her name to a well-known Allied Bureau, asking for some clothes and money to be sent by the bearer.

This attempt, however, miscarried, for her Rotterdam friend pointed out that she had plenty of money, and was the last person to do anything so incriminating as to write to them from the prison, where fortunately they knew her to be.

So the reply came back that they had never heard of her, and a second attempt produced no better result.

Then the Inspector thought of Grand'mère. A threat to send the old lady to a prison in Germany, which might well prove a fatal journey to a person of her age, might loosen the girl's tongue. Anyway, it was worth trying, and, as a result, Adrienne passed many painful hours wondering what she ought to do; for whilst she dearly loved the old lady, she could not forget all the other people who would suffer if she broke silence.

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Finally she thought, "What would 'Monsieur Archaire' do in the circumstances?" and no sooner had she put the question than she knew the right answer to her problem, and again the Germans were baffled.

Ultimately they brought Grand'mère to Lille, and after telling her that she would be sent to Germany unless Adrienne confessed, they allowed her a private interview with her granddaughter, in a cell provided with a dictaphone, by which they could overhear all that passed. The old lady was shocked to find Adrienne lying on a palliasse on the floor in a state of great exhaustion, and expressed her opinions of Huns in general with remarkable eloquence and vigour, considering her age; but otherwise the Germans overheard nothing of any special interest, for Grand'mère did not mention the fact that she was actually under sentence of imprisonment in Germany if the girl did not confess, and the latter only found it out later after the brave old woman had actually started on the long journey. Adrienne herself had made a fixed resolve to discuss her own case with no one, which proved very wise in this particular event.

Thus things generally were not looking very favourable for the Inspector's chance of promotion. He had been so certain that he had made an important capture, and, on the strength of it, had subjected the prisoner to treatment which was hardly justified by the

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nature of the offence so far actually disclosed.

There were also powerful religious influences at work on her behalf, which caused him considerable uneasiness, for "le Curé" was making quite a disturbance about the arbitrary incarceration of one of his novices, on a charge, too, which constituted no danger to the security of the German Army. Had there been any question of espionage, he pointed out, it would have been quite another matter; but in the circumstances they had no right to endanger her health and rob the Church of a promising recruit. He would appeal to the Cardinal, &c., &c., and, in fact, put up a very fine bluff, considering the weakness of the position.

The enemy therefore decided to remove the prisoner to Brussels, and Adrienne gave up hope, for she concluded that this could only mean that at last they had consulted Antwerp, or intended to do so.

On arrival she was lodged in the central jail, and interrogations, accompanied by the usual "persuasive" measures, continued much on the same lines as at Lille, but with the added mental effect due to the fact that she was out of reach of the moral support of her friends. Her only consolation was that Archer at times seemed to be strangely near, and she would wake from a happy dream, almost expecting to see him actually in her cell. Still a stage was eventually reached when life

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seemed to hold out no further attractions, and but for the terrible consequences which would ensue for her friends, she would gladly have confessed her share in the business, in order to put a termination to her miserable existence. She felt that they must have succeeded in unravelling the skein, and that they were really playing with her, like a cat with a mouse, in the hope that she would inculpate some on whom their suspicions had not yet fallen. For the first time the fear haunted her mind lest her resolution should prove unequal to the ever-increasing strain which was being placed upon it, and it was with a positive sense of relief that she at length received the information that she had been condemned to be shot for what the Germans were pleased to call "high treason."

More as a matter of form than with the idea of achieving any useful result, she protested that she had never had a proper trial; but their only reply was that, where a prisoner absolutely declined to make any defence or to give any evidence, they were perfectly justified in assuming that she was guilty, and the verdict could not be reconsidered without the production of some new material fact, which only she herself could supply.

Moreover, they hinted darkly that, in this particular case, a full-dress trial could not be carried out without disclosing information which would put certain other suspects on

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their guard, and Adrienne trembled for her friends in the convent.

On the whole, it was best that she should be put beyond the risk of betraying those who had helped her, and she accepted the fiat with resignation, asking only that "le Curé" might be allowed to minister to her before the final act took place.

This request met with instant acquiescence, which she thought indicated some symptoms of humanity in her captors, but which was due, in reality, to the hope that the priest might prevail upon her to make a confession which would provide valuable evidence.

The good old man lost no time in obeying the summons, even though his own position was obviously extremely precarious, seeing that Adrienne's condemnation could only be due to a discovery of the truth on the part of the enemy. Indeed, it puzzled him to know why he himself was still at liberty, and no light was thrown on the mystery by the Germans in Brussels, who declined even to inform him of the reasons for which she was to suffer the extreme penalty. All they would say was that a full confession on her part might still result in a commutation of the sentence, and that if he wished to save her, he should use his influence to that end; otherwise she would die the following morning.

The old man pondered deeply on this question; but the insuperable difficulties of

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following this course were as painfully obvious to him as they will be to the reader.

Still he thought that it would be only fair to give her the option, and decided to do so, though he must have felt fairly certain as to what her attitude would be.

Their first and last interview took place early on the following morning, when Adrienne rejected the idea with scorn. There are solemn occasions when it would be almost sacrilege for a third person to intrude, but it must be stated that the enemy were not above doing so in this particular instance; in fact, it formed an essential part of their methods. For us it will be necessary only to lift the veil for two brief moments.

"My child," said the old man, "the Church has done its best to help you, and many of us have had to beg forgiveness for the sins which we have committed on your behalf and in the name of France. I had hoped that you would have been spared, in order that you might repay the debt to the Holy Mother; but, alas! she has willed it otherwise, and we must bow to her decision."

"Yes, Father, I also had felt that the Church had a right to claim me, had the Almighty given me the opportunity after my work for France was done."

Then, in answer to a question, she said: "Yes, there is one last thing I would ask you to do for me; but first, have you a knife?" and on his producing one, she cut

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off a curl of her brown hair and wrapped it in a piece of paper, on which she wrote, "Adieu, Adrienne." Then she gave it to him, saying, "Will you send it at once to this address by a sure hand?" and she made him repeat the address till she was certain that he would remember it.

Shortly afterwards a German, who, unbeknown to them, had been watching the scene, entered the cell and hustled the old priest out, despite his protests and entreaties that he should be allowed to stay to the end. Once outside, he was ordered to hand over Adrienne's last message, and the official seized it eagerly. His face fell when he saw the scrap of paper containing the two pathetic words, and he appeared to be on the point of tearing it up, when the old priest, moved beyond endurance, burst out: "Have you then no bowels of compassion that you would destroy a dying girl's last message? Is that a sample of German *kultur?* If so, may Heaven have mercy on you, for civilisation will have none."

The man looked extremely embarrassed, and twirled the paper in his fingers uncertainly, before finally handing it back with a wry smile, saying, "You do us an injustice. We also have our feelings. I should prefer that you did not deliver it, and I personally consider that it would be a mistake to do so. But if you insist, so be it."

Half an hour later Adrienne was informed

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that she had been reprieved, and would be sent to Germany for the duration of the war. The first part of this statement was hardly correct, for it eventually transpired that, being unable to procure any evidence against their prisoner, they had gone through the formalities of a mock condemnation and sentence to death as a last desperate expedient to break the girl's resolution.

But "le Curé" had already started back to Lille, and did not hear of the so-called reprieve till some weeks later. Meanwhile Adrienne's message had crossed the frontier.

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CHAPTER XXII.

THE ATTACK ON THE BRIDGE.

On the night following the denunciation of Adrienne by the Town Major, Jean and his companion had started off from Lille to carry out their task of blowing up the railway bridge. In order to understand the sequence of events, it is necessary to describe in some detail the locality in which the latter was situated.

The country generally was dead flat, like most of the area drained by the Lys, and the double lines of the permanent way were carried above flood-level on a small embankment rising to a height of some fifteen feet where it crossed the rivulet, over which was a single-span girder bridge about twenty feet long, resting on masonry abutments. At each of the four corners there was a low masonry pillar, but there was no parapet, whilst the bridge floor was open, and could only be crossed by stepping on the sleepers.

It was not, therefore, in any way a big structure, nor was the actual obstacle which

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it spanned a formidable one, consisting as it did merely of a sluggish muddy brook running between marshy banks. It had been selected, *faute de mieux*, because all the larger bridges crossed rivers or canals in close proximity to considerable towns, and none of them held out any hope of success, as they were strongly guarded; also no landing for an aeroplane would have been possible in the neighbourhood, and this latter now formed an essential feature of the scheme, since our friends depended on it for their explosives. It might be assumed that the Germans would have no difficulty in replacing the broken girders at short notice, since the material necessary for that purpose formed an article of store in every army; but if a train could be wrecked in the gap, the enemy would probably have to make a diversion, which would mean a good deal of earth-work, and therefore take time.

The locality also was a fairly favourable one, for the only dwellings near by were a few cottages close to the level-crossing, in which lived the N.C.O. and seven or eight Germans who provided the single sentry for the bridge. Some 500 yards to the west of the railway ran a main road, the intervening land being alternate patches of standing corn and lucern, belonging to a farm which fronted on to the road. To the east there was standing corn close up to the railway, with a narrow strip of tangled grass along

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the edges of the brook. Beyond the corn lay a belt of trees, and then a big grass field, which was well screened from the railway by the trees, and which Jean had decided was quite a suitable landing-ground for an aeroplane.

The farm to which the land belonged was some half a mile or more away, and it was connected with the main road by a cart-track, which crossed the railway at the level-crossing already mentioned.

The owner of the farm was a friend of the man whom they were going to pick up in Courtrai, and the latter had already joined Jean and the other Belgian before the events occurred which will now be related. As Jean's confederates were both Belgians, it will be gathered that closer acquaintanceship with *les Braves* had caused him to modify his previous prejudices against them. Our friends had not thought it wise or necessary to inform the farmer of their actual plans, since he might very possibly have raised the strongest objections to their damaging the line near his land, as being likely to lead to serious trouble for himself. From what they had told him he merely imagined that they were going to receive a message of some sort from an aeroplane, after which they would all disperse as rapidly as possible.

On this assumption he raised no objection to hiding them during the day, nor to allowing them to make use of hay from the ricks in

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the corner of the field, which was required for marking the landing-ground. He merely drew the line at actually helping them to prepare the piles which were to form the signal bonfires, so that he could disclaim all knowledge, and prove an alibi when the inevitable investigations were made subsequently.

Our friends, however, had soon made the necessary arrangements, the heaps of hay being arranged so as to indicate to the aeroplane the best direction in which to land, as Jean had been taught at the aerodrome. By the side of each pile they also placed spare hay for replenishing the bonfire, and buckets of water to douse it, if required.

Having completed these arrangements, Jean and his confederates discussed the question of watching the bridge, to see if the Germans had made any change in their routine since Jean was last there. The latter was not in favour of showing himself anywhere near the level-crossing, since he did not want his friend there to see him, for Jean had given reasons for his previous visits which would thereby be shown to be false. Besides, there was no object in implicating the man in what promised, if all went well, to be an extremely unpleasant surprise for the enemy. The latter were creatures of habit, and it was unlikely that they would have made any change in the routine of relieving the sentry. Jean and his friends had been up all the preceding night, and would again be

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on the move all that night too, so eventually they decided to chance it, and all took cover in a big barn, where they slept till nightfall.

It must have been close on 11 P.M., and the moon was just rising, when they again crept out, and the two Belgians made their way to their posts and lay down by the piles of hay, ready to light up—one keeping watch towards the trees in the direction of the level-crossing, whilst the other gazed into the sky in the direction of Courtrai.

Meantime Jean had reached the belt of trees, and was making his way cautiously along the edge of the corn on the north bank of the brook, his eyes fixed intently on the bridge, where a solitary figure gradually came into view, silhouetted against the dark sky in the diffused light of the moon, which had not yet topped the trees behind Jean.

The latter crawled slowly forward, straining his eyes in the endeavour to make out whether the sentry was looking towards him or in the other direction.

Gradually he worked his way forward until he was only fifty yards from the bridge, eventually taking cover behind the trunk of a willow, to watch the sentry who was now pacing slowly backwards and forwards on the embankment. Then Jean saw him stop, and as the moon came up over the belt of trees it shone full on to his white face when he looked down in Jean's direction. Good! thought

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the latter; now I can tell for certain which way he is looking.

The man continued his monotonous pacing, and then, to Jean's relief, he stopped and leant over the low pillar at the far side of the track, gazing apparently across the field towards the main road, along which a column of troops of some kind was marching; for, in the still air, Jean could hear the rumble of iron-shod wheels on the cobble-stones.

He crept forward, the man still motionless above, and safely reached the bridge, under which the grass was worn bare by people passing underneath, flattening himself into the shadow against the foot of the abutment lest the sentry should look down between the sleepers.

There he stayed for some time, listening for any movement on the part of the man above, which would indicate a change of position.

Jean knew that midnight, the time chosen by Headquarters for the arrival of the aeroplane, was singularly unfortunate, for when he had made his various reconnaissances he had observed that it was actually about this time that the sentry was changed. The relief might therefore be moving along the embankment as the aeroplane arrived, and they could hardly fail to notice it; besides which he himself might have three men to deal with instead of only one.

He waited for a time, hoping that the

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relief would be carried out punctually, but there was no sign of it, and still the sentry remained motionless above in the same position. He looked at his watch; it was only a few minutes to twelve, and the aeroplane might arrive at any moment. At five minutes past twelve he decided that he could wait no longer, and must take his chance that the hour of relief had been changed. He removed his boots, and as he did so he heard the sentry's rifle rattle, as apparently he laid or dropped it on the ground. That did not look as if he expected to be relieved, or surely he would be on the alert, ready to get away to bed as soon as possible.

Jean wished that he and his friends had not taken it for granted that the enemy would stick to their usual routine, and that some one had watched during the afternoon instead of sleeping. However, there was no object in waiting any longer, and he stole quietly back to the side of the bridge farthest away from the sentry, crawled through the long grass up the embankment, and peered over the edge. The sentry was still leaning over the pillar, gazing away towards the road, his helmet in his hand, for the night was warm, and he was heavily clad.

Jean took in the situation at a glance, and he rose and leapt across the permanent way. The man must have heard a stone move, for he half turned his head as Jean reached him; but he was too late, for the

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Frenchman had seized him by the knees, and lifting him, thrust him head-foremost over the edge of the bridge. He fell with a dull thud on the path below, and his helmet rolled away with a hollow clang. Jean ran down the embankment, and found that the man was lying like a log, but whether his neck was broken or not, he did not stop to ascertain, for he was busy taking off his equipment and then his long grey cloak; having done which he rolled him into the stream, and looked round for the helmet. Two minutes later, Jean, in full German equipment, was pacing up and down the embankment in front of the bridge, keeping a sharp look-out towards the level-crossing, and glancing occasionally towards Courtrai; whilst on the main road the long column still went rumbling past, quite unconscious of the tragedy which had happened only a few hundred yards away.

Some time previously an aeroplane of a slow type, specially selected for ease in landing, had crossed the front a little north of Messines, and was now, like a flighting duck, following the silver streak of the Lys, past the apparently dead townships of Commines, Werwick, and Menin, until it reached the dark mass of Courtrai, where a few scattered lights still showed. There it began to circle, gaining height, as if in some doubt as to its way, and then one, two, and finally a third brilliant star floated slowly down towards the

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slumbering town, causing considerable astonishment and uneasiness amongst the few watchers, lest some bombs should be going to follow; for dropping "eggs" on the railway bridges was quite a favourite amusement for British 'planes, and the town was apt to suffer from the shorts and overs—considerably more, in fact, than the bridges from the hits. Still the machine circled above, for in the slanting moonlight the pilot could not clearly make out the railway line below which was to guide him onwards to his destination. At this juncture two trains left for the north at short intervals, and as he watched the red glow from the funnels, he saw them diverge. His way was clear, and he thankfully followed one of them for a few miles, his eyes fixed intently on the ground to his right. Then he suddenly swerved, throttled down his engine, put the nose of the aeroplane down, and made a perfect landing in a big grass field where two bonfires were blazing —for the Belgians had seen the signals in the sky over Courtrai, and had carried out their instructions with commendable promptitude.

Meantime Jean, manfully restraining a desire to empty his magazine into such an easy target, had stood smartly to attention at his post as the train, which had guided the pilot, thundered by, the driver waving to him as he passed. There was still no movement at the level-crossing, for the gates

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were normally set so as to leave the line clear, and only opened to let road traffic through, which seldom happened at night, for, as already mentioned, it was merely a cart-track leading to the farm. He heard the aeroplane approaching, and when the engine was shut off he could have shouted for joy, since he knew that it must have picked up the ground lights and was landing. Everything was proceeding "according to plan."

But apparently some one at the level-crossing must also have heard it—or was it the relief?—for lights appeared in the doorway of one of the houses, and he had some anxious moments before the door was again closed, and he concluded that it was merely a coincidence, or that if any one had heard the aeroplane, they had not thought it incumbent on them to turn out and make a search at that time of night, until their help was actually called for.

To return to the big grass field, the bonfires had been doused with water directly the machine landed, and the pilot was now indicating to the two Belgians that the explosives were in the vacant observer's seat. Whilst they were getting out the stuff, he asked one of them where Adrienne and Jean were. The man only caught the last name, for he had never heard of Adrienne, and by way of reply turned and pointed in the direction of the bridge.

The pilot had kept the engine running, as

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otherwise he could not have got off again without assistance, but in the stillness of the night it seemed to him to be making far too much noise, and in trying to throttle it down still further he accidentally stopped it. This was awkward, but he waited until the cargo was unloaded before asking the men if either of them knew how to swing the propeller. To his relief, one of them stepped in front and performed the operation quite in expert style.

Then an idea struck the pilot: why should he not stay and see the fun? And then he could report definitely whether the demolition had been successful. It was rather poor-spirited to fly away and leave these civilians and a girl to run all the danger; he had not been given definite orders to come back at once—which was rather special pleading, because, of course, no one imagined he would do anything else,—besides, he knew all about fixing the gun-cotton, and these people might easily make a mess of it, and blow themselves up instead of the bridge.

So he argued to himself; but the reader, who will have guessed that the pilot's name was Archer, will also appreciate better perhaps than he himself did, that there was possibly an additional reason, which tipped the balance. In any case his decision did credit to his loyalty and courage, if not to his judgment, and having made it, he lost no time in getting out of the machine, when, having distributed the explosives between

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them, the three started towards the bridge. As they got up to the belt of trees, Archer sent one of the Belgians forward to reconnoitre, and Jean, who was on the look-out, hailed him with a low whistle and waved his rifle; then they all three went forward, and took cover under the bridge.

Archer looked about for Adrienne, and seeing no sign of her, called up to Jean, "Where is Adrienne?"—getting the short reply—"Lille."

Jean did not seem inclined to be communicative, so Archer did not pursue the subject; for they had plenty of other things to think about, and there was no time to lose.

On previous occasions it was Jean who had led and Archer who had followed, but unconsciously the latter now assumed command of the party, and they accepted his leadership without hesitation.

He whispered some instructions to Jean, and the latter went a short way down the track towards the level-crossing to keep watch, whilst Archer took charge of the actual fixing of the charges. The people on the other side, from whom Archer had received them, knew the plan of the bridge, and the slabs of gun-cotton were already securely fixed to short lengths of board, through which holes had been made for the detonators.

Under Archer's direction these were firmly lashed against the main girders, about four feet from the ends nearest to the level-cross-

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ing, the idea being that the conspirators could then get away quickly to the aeroplane without having to cross the brook.

This part of the operation was soon finished, and it only remained to put in the detonators, bring the instantaneous fuze to which they were fixed up through the floorway and connect it with the flat detonators, clipped on to the top of each of the four railway metals. The first train which came in either direction would explode at least two of the charges on the same principle as a fog-signal.

Archer had finished three out of the four —for he did not trust the Belgians to do this somewhat dangerous and delicate operation —and was still lying on his face working at the fourth, when Jean came running back with the news that the relief had left the level-crossing and was coming along the embankment, the time then being about 12.30 A.M. At the same moment a wire rattled, and they heard a signal go down somewhere near. A train would be passing in at most five minutes, yet it looked to Archer as if they were going to be beaten on the post, for the Germans would certainly arrive before the train, which was not yet in sight; in fact, they were only some 200 yards away, though apparently still unconscious of what was going on in front of them.

But if they arrived before the train, they would find that the sentry had disappeared, and could hardly fail to notice the detonators

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on the line, and Archer knew that all their efforts would have been in vain. "You must stop them till the train comes," he said; and as Jean went back a few yards, he told the Belgians to get away over the bridge—for they were unarmed, as was he also for the matter of that—and then he again threw himself on his face and tried feverishly to complete the last connection.

But fixing a fuze into a detonator by moonlight is not an easy matter at the best of times, and lying on your face across sleepers makes it no easier. It seemed to take ages —actually it was little more than a minute —before he had finally got it right. The two Germans, who had been steadily approaching all the time, were now quite close, and as he got up he heard them call out something in German to the bogus sentry. Getting no reply, and perhaps because they had caught sight of Archer, or because they noted something suspicious in the attitude and appearance of the sentry—for the moon was now well up—they both half raised their rifles. Thinking they were going to shoot, Jean settled any doubts by dropping on one knee and taking aim. Next moment he had fired, and one man fell. The second German promptly fired at Jean, and the latter fell in a heap, and then rolled across the metal, where he lay writhing.

Without a moment's hesitation Archer dashed forward from the bridge, the German

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having a shot at him which went wide, and then another as Archer threw himself down close to where Jean's rifle lay, and quickly recharged it. For a moment the German thought that he too had been hit, and before he could find out his mistake Archer had shot him dead.

Then the Englishman ran forward and quickly rolled the bodies of the two Germans over the edge of the embankment, for fear that the driver of the coming train might see an obstruction on the line and pull up before reaching the bridge.

Lights were already moving at the level-crossing as he went to Jean, who was now sitting up groaning and holding his leg.

"Are you badly hurt?" he inquired anxiously.

"My left leg is smashed below the knee, and my right knee is injured. I cannot move; pull me clear of the line, and then get away quick—I am done for."

This was the last thing which Archer had any intention of doing, and he looked hastily up and down the line. The red lights of a train were approaching from the south, whilst more Germans were coming along the permanent way from the direction of the level-crossing. There was no sign of the Belgians, and Archer bitterly regretted having sent them away. Could he get Jean across the bridge before the train reached it? It would be a near thing, but he might just do it,

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and then the explosion would cover their retreat, and give the Germans something else to think about. It was the only possible chance of saving Jean.

"Quick," he said, as he knelt down on one knee beside him, "put your arms round my neck and hang on tight." Then with a great effort—for Jean was a fairly heavy man and Archer but a stripling—he got up on to his feet and commenced the perilous passage across the bridge, slowly stepping from sleeper to sleeper, and scarcely conscious of the men who were running up behind, or of the rapidly approaching train in front; for his mind was entirely occupied by fear lest Jean should faint and relax the grip round his neck which was almost throttling him.

When at last he reached the farther side, the train was scarcely 100 yards away, and perhaps it was the fear of hitting it that prevented the men behind from firing.

Had they done so they might have warned the driver, and caused him to pull up in time.

As Archer scrambled down the embankment into the field at the side, it thundered past him, and the next minute there was a deafening explosion, followed by the tearing and rending of wood, accompanying a series of gradually diminishing crashes as waggon after waggon dashed into the back of the one in front and added to the indescribable tangle, finally finishing with a terrific explosion as an ammunition truck went up. The air was

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filled with flying fragments, to the great alarm of the Belgians, who had been watching Archer's perilous journey across the bridge with breathless anxiety, and had gallantly come forward ready to take Jean from him as he reached the bottom of the embankment.

Fragments were still falling round them as, carrying Jean, they made their way as fast as they could down the side of the brook, looking for a bridge of some kind by which to cross over and get to the aeroplane.

As they toiled along, they could hear the hubbub behind them growing ever louder, but no one seemed to be paying any particular attention to them, and they proceeded more deliberately. When they had got about opposite to where the Belgians said the 'plane was, Archer called a halt, and waded across the muddy brook up to his waist; then somehow they managed to get Jean over, carrying him as carefully as they could, for he had fainted.

At last they reached the machine, and laid the wounded man down on the grass, when Archer made a rough splint and tied his leg up with a handkerchief and a first-aid bandage which he had in his pocket. He had already decided what to do.

To leave Jean in the farm would mean certain capture, and the other two could not be expected to stay with him, as they were naturally anxious to get well away from the neighbourhood before daylight.

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If the Germans found Jean it would mean death both to him and to the farmer, who would thereby be implicated in the destruction of the bridge; so Archer gave some whispered instructions to the men, and they lifted Jean into the observer's seat, and placed him in as comfortable a position as possible.

The pilot then climbed in, and the man who had previously swung the propeller was told to do it again. The engine was cold and would not start, and but for the uproar of the railway they could hardly have failed to attract attention. As it was, however, the whole of the picket were now at the bridge; and not only they, since the column on the road had halted, and men were running down the cart-track from it towards the level-crossing, and also across the corn-field; for part of the train was burning fiercely, and trucks were exploding at intervals.

At last, to every one's relief, the engine started, and Archer told the Belgians to get away, which they lost no further time in doing, for they had to reach cover before daylight, and the way was long.

As the old machine sped over the grass and bravely took the air in a northerly direction, Archer considered whether he should swing round right-handed over the farm, or left-handed on to the railway, which was to be his guide back to Courtrai.

The thought of the farm reminded him of

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the farmer. Poor devil! What would happen to him next day? The Germans would be certain to think he had had a hand in the events of the night, if they had not spotted the aeroplane. It might divert suspicion from him and also from the Belgians, and help them to get away, if the enemy actually saw the aeroplane. He would make certain anyway that they did so now, and he swung round left-handed on to the railway, coming back rather low over the level-crossing; for he wanted to get Jean home quickly, and could not waste time in gaining height.

As he crossed it he could see a number of figures coming down the cart-track from the main road, and there was no doubt, from the flashes of their rifles as they fired at him, that they had seen him. "Good!" he thought, and at the same moment felt a sharp pain in one leg, but went on down the railway, rising all the time. Streaming across the corn-fields on his right were more men, and as he approached the scene of the wreck he could see that the whole place was lit up by burning waggons, some of which were lying on their side half down the embankment.

There were crowds round, and as he passed overhead, in the full light of the conflagration, a perfect fusilade was opened, and suddenly he was struck a terrific blow. For a second he almost lost control of the machine, but with a great effort of will he righted it. But he knew that he was seriously, if not

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mortally, wounded, and wondered if he would retain consciousness long enough to get the machine home. Then a sudden fear seized him lest Jean too had been hit again, but so far as he could see there appeared to be no change in the position of the unconscious figure in front, and he hoped that he had escaped. As he looked at Jean, his heart went out to him, and he clenched his teeth, determined that, come what may, he would get him across the lines.

By the time that he reached Courtrai he could hardly feel the foot control, but his eyes were still clear and his teeth set. Mechanically he followed the Lys, still shining silvery in the moonlight, as he had done on the outward journey; but to shorten the flight he swung away to the right at Menin, following the Menin road past Hooge, and so over the ruins of Ypres, where the shattered walls of the Cathedral and the Cloth Hall lifted jagged arms as if in mute protest against the unmerited destruction which had fallen upon them. The heaps of limestone, which had once been fair houses, cleared to the sides of the road, shone white in the moonlight, and away before him stretched the long straight line of the Poperinghe road, which would guide him towards home. But the pilot scarcely noticed all this, for he was sinking fast, and he knew it. Already the ground below was becoming blurred to his failing vision; now he could scarcely distinguish the long straight road, and then

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he knew that he could never reach his destination. He had almost abandoned hope when, with the instinct of the homing pigeon, he faintly discerned symmetrical lights slightly to his right.

Thank God! that must be an aerodrome. He nerved himself for a last effort, and turned towards it; switched off his engine, and scraping over some trees, drifted down on to the grass beyond.

When the men on duty in the hangars came out to see who this midnight visitor might be, reposing motionless in the middle of their aerodrome, a strange sight met their eyes, and one of them went off hurriedly to fetch an officer; for in the front seat was a dead man who, from his uniform, they took to be a German, whilst behind was a strange pilot, his head hanging apparently lifelessly over the side, one hand still grasping the control lever. They were almost speechless with astonishment, and their wonder was only deepened when, on lifting Jean out, it was seen that the long German coat covered a civilian's clothes. Telephone inquiries by the officer soon served to identify the unknown pilot; but to the rank and file, who did not hear the subsequent fuller explanation, the arrival of the strange visitors no doubt still remains one of the unfathomable mysteries of the war.

But Jean, as Archer had hoped, was not dead, nor even mortally wounded, and Archer

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also proved to be still alive, though his case was far more serious; so much so that the doctors marvelled how he could have landed the machine, and Jean could throw no light on the question. He, indeed, was as astonished as a man well could be when he came to and found himself in a British hospital; and there was no one to tell him how he had got there, for Archer was still unconscious. On one point only was he quite clear—viz., that the boy had saved his life, and that he must be put alongside him in hospital; and so the same ambulance took them away, for the hospitals near by were being cleared in anticipation of the wounded, who were already coming in fast from the opening stages of the third battle of Ypres.

There Archer rallied for a short time, and Jean learnt something of what had happened.

He, for his part, asked Jean anxiously for news of Adrienne, and, seeing how matters were, the Frenchman lied nobly, assuring the poor boy that she was *très bien*, and that, thinking Archer might be coming in the aeroplane, she had told Jean to be sure and give him her love, as unfortunately she was too busy in Lille with other matters to get away. This seemed to comfort him greatly. To Jean's endeavours to thank him for saving his life, he would only whisper, "That's nothing, old man; you've done much more for me, and would do it again."

But it was soon clear that Jean was not

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to have the opportunity, for it became increasingly evident that Archer could not last long—and, indeed, his mother had already been telegraphed for. Unfortunately, on the morning that she reached Boulogne, the boy's brave spirit made its last flight, *per ardua ad astra*, leaving the smuggler prostrate with grief, for he had learnt to love the boy with a sincerity strange in such a hardened sinner, whose whole life had been spent in a struggle against legally constituted authority. Perhaps if he had met a few of Archer's kind in his younger days his manner of life would have been different.

Archer was put to rest near the hospital, in the war cemetery where sleep many of Britain's bravest and best, who came at her call from every quarter of the globe. And when the last trump shall sound, and the graves give up their dead, he will rise in a goodly company, and will not be ashamed.

And were the other bridges blown up? Who knows? but the reader may calculate for himself the chances of success or failure from this single instance, and it is unlikely that the other parties carried out their tasks with greater, or even with equal, skill and devotion. Certainly the course of the battle would not lead one to suppose that they met with any great measure of success; but that would not be conclusive, since it was the weather and not the enemy which beat the

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patient, plodding infantry, struggling forward through the ever-deepening mud.

Then Archer's sacrifice was in vain?

No! a thousand times No! For if the destruction of the bridge delayed even a few train-loads of men or munitions from reaching the front, as it must have done, it saved many a gallant life—and could any English gentleman ask more in exchange for his own? Certainly not Archer, who would have answered, in the true public-school spirit, "Who dies if England lives?"

And even if we take the least favourable view of the material results achieved, the moral effects of such an exploit are incalculable. Should we not then rather say with Lindsay Gordon—

> "Let never a tear his memory stain,
> Give his ashes never a sigh,—
> One of many who perished, NOT IN VAIN,
> AS A TYPE OF OUR CHIVALRY."

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L'ENVOI.

JEAN'S injuries were not really serious, and though he walks with a slight limp, he is as active as ever; but during the war he went no more a-roaming. No doubt he would have been ready to answer the call had it come, but it was thought that he had earned a rest, and he was given it in the shape of a quiet billet on the lines of communication, where the Croix de Guerre, which he now wore alongside his British medal, made a brave show, earning him many a *petit verre* from the men, and, what he valued far more, many a soft smile from the ladies.

Faithful to his promise, "Le Commandant" obtained a remission of the term of imprisonment to which he had been condemned in default for his last smuggling exploit, and after the Armistice he returned to his village, full of honour and renown.

But his house was in ruins, burnt, as we know, by his own hand, and though he was not ungenerously treated, perhaps he wanted money to rebuild it in style.

In any case, one cannot teach an old dog

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new tricks, and Jean soon found a life of respectability unutterably boring, even when combined with all the *éclat* of being the hero of the village. Not long after the Armistice the reader may have noticed a paragraph in the daily papers, somewhat to the following effect :—

"AFFRAY WITH SMUGGLERS ON THE BELGIAN FRONTIER.

"A daring attempt by armed smugglers to run two motor lorries full of contraband across the frontier led to a hot engagement between them and the Customs authorities, in which two of the latter were wounded. Finally, one of the lorries was captured, with one severely wounded smuggler, but the remainder of the gang escaped in the other lorry across the frontier into Belgium."

Jean was in the "other" lorry, and the writer is not ashamed to confess that he hopes he always will be!

And Adrienne? After their last failure to induce her to speak in the prison at Brussels, the Germans sent her to Germany, to the deep chagrin of the Inspector, who, instead of the anticipated promotion, may be presumed to have received a censure for having made a great fuss about what apparently was all a mare's nest. It was no doubt to cover up the apparently unjustifiable tortures

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which he had inflicted on her, that they sent her out of the country.

It was more than a year later when both she and Grand'mère were sent back to their beloved France, which was once more free of the hated invader.

There from Jean she heard of Archer's death, and the manner in which he had met his end. It is perhaps hardly necessary to say that the tragedy grieved her very deeply, and for a time she was inconsolable. But it removed one of the obstacles to following the path which had been marked out for her in the prison at Brussels—viz., to repay her debt to the Church, which had saved her, by devoting the remainder of her life to its service.

There still remained the question of Grand'mère, and Adrienne pondered long and earnestly as to where her duty lay. Seeing, however, that the old lady had other relatives in the village, quite apart from Jean, who were only too willing to watch over her declining years, the girl came to the conclusion that "le Curé" had a right to claim her, and thus it was that she returned to Lille, and passed once again through the great convent gates.

The pretty brown hair is now hidden under a dark veil; the beautiful eyes shine softly out from under a white coif; and the smile, which was perhaps her greatest charm, has taken on a tinge of sadness, which perhaps

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will pass away in time. And if her thoughts sometimes stray, when she looks out from the casement window from which she saw her boy hero fight his last great air-battle and emerge victorious against overwhelming odds, let us remember that nuns are human, that Adrienne is young, and hope that it may not be accounted unto her for sin.

It only remains to tell of the fate of the curl of brown hair which she cut off in prison and sent as a farewell message to Archer. It reached the address in Holland fully a month after the boy had been laid to rest, and was forwarded to his home in the country by the English officer who had met Adrienne in the hotel at Rotterdam. At the first opportunity after the Armistice his mother went over to visit her son's grave, and wishing at the same time to visit the scenes of his exploits, and to thank the brave people who had sheltered him, she took Adrienne's last letter to serve as an introduction to Grand'mère. There she heard for the first time that Adrienne had been spared, and in the circumstances she felt that, even as Archer's mother, she had no right to keep a token which had been sent under a false impression of the actual course of subsequent events. She therefore begged the old lady to accept it as a tribute of admiration and gratitude from the mother of an English officer, who had lost her only son.

And thus it is that Grand'mère, silver-haired and frail, but greatly honoured, sits peace-

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fully in the whitewashed kitchen, and looks proudly but sometimes sadly at the Cross of the Legion of Honour and the curl of brown hair in the simple frame which hangs by the side of the old stove. The curl is now not the only British tribute, for recently another frame has been added, containing a medal with a purple ribbon, of which Grand'mère is intensely proud.

And when, during the long winter evenings, the neighbours gather in the old kitchen and tell over the well-known stories of the war, the old lady's face glows with pride as she recounts the exploits of her favourite granddaughter; for, *pace* Jean, of all the local heroes and heroines there is none who can vie in the popular fancy with fair Adrienne. Was she not decorated by both the French and British Armies? and, as Jean is wont to observe, glancing at his own manly breast, there is only one man and certainly no other women in the Commune who has won this superlative honour.

Who knows but that, as the years roll by, Adrienne may not acquire something of the glamour of the Maid of Orleans, and by her example inspire future generations with the spirit of her own burning patriotism.

France may have need of it.

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